



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

THURSDAY — 3 MAR 2022



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HEADLINE	03/03 Japan new sanctions on Russia, Belarus
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/03/03/japan-Japan-sanctions-Russian-oligarchs-Belarus-Ukraine/1911646310605/
GIST	<p>March 3 (UPI) -- Japan announced a new round of sanctions against Russia and Belarus on Thursday, targeting banks, officials and -- in a first for the country -- several Russian oligarchs, as it continues to join with the United States and Europe in an aggressive economic response to the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida approved sanctions that will freeze the assets of 18 Russian individuals and four banks, as well as seven high-ranking Belarusian officials, Japan's foreign ministry said.</p> <p>Among the Russian oligarchs named are Rosneft boss Igor Sechin, whose yacht was seized by France on Thursday; billionaire financier Yuri Kovalchuk; VTB Bank chairman Andrei Kostin; and Sergei Chemezov, head of weapons maker Rostec.</p> <p>Also making the sanctions list are Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko and defense minister Viktor Khrenin.</p> <p>Washington applauded the move, with U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emmanuel saying Thursday the coordinated international measures were turning Russia into a "pariah state."</p> <p>"Japan's resolute action demonstrates clearly to Russia's oligarchs and corrupt leaders that they can no longer enjoy the benefit of Putin's violent regime," Emmanuel said in a statement.</p> <p>"Together, we are isolating Russia as it continues its descent as a pariah state, and we are committed to imposing unprecedented economic costs for Putin's cronies and enablers," he said.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Biden administration announced a "KleptoCapture" task force specifically targeting the assets of Russian oligarchs and the tools they use to evade sanctions.</p> <p>Tokyo has long taken a cautious foreign policy approach with Moscow and appeared hesitant at first to fully engage in the Western-led sanctions regime after Russia invaded Ukraine last week.</p> <p>But Kishida has since taken decisive steps to join the punishing economic measures, including freezing the Russian central bank's foreign exchange assets and banning some Russian banks from the SWIFT international banking network.</p> <p>Japanese corporations have also begun to distance themselves further from Russia amid security and supply chain concerns. Automaker Toyota announced Wednesday that it was suspending production at its plant in St. Petersburg and halting imports of vehicles indefinitely. Honda and Mazda earlier announced they were stopping shipments to Russia.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Japan scrambled a fighter jet and lodged a diplomatic protest after a suspected Russian helicopter entered its airspace.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Fast moving wildfire Calif. Orange Co.
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-03-02/wildfire-breaks-out-in-cleveland-national-forest

GIST	<p>Firefighters are working to gain the upper hand on a fast-moving wildfire that broke out Wednesday in the Cleveland National Forest.</p> <p>The blaze was first reported at 10 acres around 11:20 a.m. near the Holy Jim Trail in Orange County. Within three hours, the fire had swelled to 400 acres.</p> <p>But crews on the ground laying down containment lines and an aerial attack that included aircraft releasing fire retardant and helicopters dropping water helped stop much of the blaze's forward momentum in the early evening, said Nathan Judy, Cleveland National Forest's public affairs officer.</p> <p>The fire had charred 500 acres and had no containment as of 7 p.m. Nearly 100 personnel were fighting the blaze in steep terrain, officials said.</p> <p>"The fire has really laid down and the forward rate of spread has stopped," Judy said Wednesday evening. "We'll have crews working throughout the night monitoring and constructing containment line."</p> <p>The fire began at the bottom of a drainage area along the canyon and ran uphill, prompting its rapid spread, Judy said, adding that the cause of the blaze was still under investigation.</p> <p>The fire encroached on the Holy fire burn scar, which helped slow the spread, he said.</p> <p>The Holy Jim hiking area had been closed for rehabilitation following the 2018 Holy fire, which burned more than 20,000 acres.</p> <p>The fire was not threatening any structures Wednesday afternoon, although some communication towers were in its path, Judy said.</p> <p>"It would take a wind shift to put it into populated areas," he said. The Orange County Fire Authority, which was helping with the blaze, said it was not a threat to Orange County homes.</p> <p>Fire crews faced little wind and could be assisted by cooler temperatures Thursday and possible rain Friday.</p> <p>The South Coast Air Quality Management District said the fire had not affected air quality in the region.</p> <p>"We do see that the smoke plume is staying in the upper atmosphere and not reaching the surface," Nahal Mogharabi, the district's director of communications, said in an emailed statement. "We are not currently seeing smoke impacts in our network."</p> <p>The lack of winds should prevent a smoke advisory in the South Coast region, Mogharabi said.</p> <p>"We continue to keep an eye on the fire as well as weather patterns and will provide information as necessary," he wrote.</p> <p>As of 7 p.m., air quality was good to moderate across the AQMD's coverage zone, which stretches from the L.A. coast to the mountains east of the Coachella Valley.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia firms open China bank accounts
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/exclusive-russian-firms-rush-open-chinese-bank-accounts-sanctions-bite-sources-2022-03-03/
GIST	SHANGHAI, March 3 (Reuters) - The Moscow branch of a Chinese state bank has seen a surge in enquiries from Russian firms wanting to open new accounts, a person familiar with the matter said, as the country's businesses struggle with international sanctions after its invasion of Ukraine.

"Over the past few days, 200-300 companies have approached us, wanting to open new accounts," the person, who works at the Moscow branch of a Chinese state bank and has direct knowledge of its operations, told Reuters.

He declined to be named or have his bank identified as he is not authorised to speak with media.

It was not clear how widespread Russian demand for new accounts at Chinese banks was, but the banker source told Reuters many of the companies seeking new accounts do business with China and that he expected yuan transactions by such firms to increase.

Western governments are shutting off Russia's economy from the global financial system, pushing international companies to halt sales, cut ties and dump tens of billions of dollars' worth of investments.

China has repeatedly voiced opposition to the sanctions, calling them ineffective and insisting it will maintain normal economic and trade exchanges with Russia.

A handful of Chinese state banks operate in Moscow, including Industrial & Commercial Bank of China (601398.SS), Agricultural Bank of China (601288.SS), Bank of China and China Construction Bank (601939.SS).

China Construction Bank declined to comment. The other three Chinese state banks did not respond to Reuters' request for comment.

A Chinese businessman with long-term ties with Russia, who also did not want to be identified, said several Russian companies he works with are now planning to open yuan accounts.

"It's pretty simple logic. If you cannot use U.S. dollars, or euros, and U.S. and Europe stop selling you many products, you have no other options but to turn to China. The trend is inevitable," the source told Reuters.

As a growing number of Western companies abandon Russia, the willingness of emerging market giants such as China to sustain business relations with Moscow highlights a deep rift over Europe's biggest crisis since the World War Two. That trend could threaten to chip away the dominance of the U.S. dollar in global trade.

FESCO Transportation Group , a major Russian transport and logistics company, said this week it will accept Chinese yuan from customers, after some Russian banks were kicked out of the global financial messaging system SWIFT.

"It's natural for Russian companies to be willing to accept yuan," said Shen Muhui, head of a trade body that promotes links between Russia and China.

But small Chinese exporters are suffering from a tumble in the rouble and many are suspending deliveries to avoid potential losses, he said.

The Russian currency dived to a record low of more than 17 rouble to the yuan on Wednesday , having lost nearly 40% of its value against the Chinese unit over the past week.

"Companies will be switching to yuan-rouble business but in any case things will become two, three or four times more expensive for Russians because the exchange rate between the yuan and rouble is also changing," said Konstantin Popov, a Russian entrepreneur in Shanghai.

Shen said Russian demand for Chinese goods will nevertheless grow in the long term. "The key is to solve trade settlement issues" in the face of sanctions, he said.

HEADLINE	03/03 Russia FM: will fight war to 'the end'
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/headline/sergei-lavrov-nato-volodymyr-zelenskyy-moscow/2022/03/03/id/1059407/
GIST	<p>Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday he believed some foreign leaders were preparing for war against Russia and that Moscow would press on with its military operation in Ukraine until "the end."</p> <p>Lavrov also said Russia had no thoughts of nuclear war.</p> <p>Offering no evidence to back up his remarks in an interview with state television, a week after Russian invaded Ukraine, he also accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, an ethnic Jew, of presiding over "a society where Nazism is flourishing."</p> <p>He said he had no doubt that a solution to the crisis in Ukraine would be found, and a new round of talks were about to start between Ukrainian and Russian officials.</p> <p>But he said Russia's dialog with the West must be based on mutual respect, accused NATO of seeking to maintain supremacy and said that while Russia had a lot of goodwill, it could not let anyone undermine its interests.</p> <p>Moscow would not let Ukraine keep infrastructure that threatened Russia, he said.</p> <p>Moscow could also not tolerate what he said was a military threat from Ukraine, he said, adding that he was convinced that Russia was right over Ukraine.</p> <p>"The thought of nuclear is constantly spinning in the heads of Western politicians but not in the heads of Russians," he said. "I assure you that we will not allow any kind of provocation to unbalance us."</p> <p>Russia did not feel politically isolated, and the question of how Ukraine lives should be defined by its people, he said.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials have accused Russian forces of hitting civilian areas but Lavrov said Russian troops had strict orders to use high-precision weapons to destroy military infrastructure.</p> <p>Offering no evidence, Lavrov said Russia had information that the United States was worried about the prospect of losing control over what he described as chemical and biological laboratories in Ukraine and accused Britain of building military bases there.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia claims Ukraine seaport
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-coronavirus-pandemic-business-sports-cbd6eed3e1b8f4946f5f490afd06b4be
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces have taken a strategic Ukrainian seaport and set siege to another as Moscow tries to cut its neighbor off from the Black Sea.</p> <p>The Russian military said Thursday it had control of Kherson, which has a population of 280,000 people, making it the first major city to fall since a Russian invasion began last week.</p> <p>Russian armored vehicles were seen in the otherwise empty streets of Kherson, in videos shared with The Associated Press by a resident</p> <p>Meanwhile, heavy fighting continued in Mariupol, in the outskirts of the strategic the Azov Sea port city. Electricity and phone connections are mostly not working in Mariupol, which faces food and water shortages.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Experts: disasters loom for West Coast
SOURCE	https://www.yahoo.com/now/could-happen-tomorrow-experts-know-230027986.html
GIST	<p>It's the elevators that worry earthquake engineering expert Keith Porter the most.</p> <p>Scientists say a massive quake could strike the San Francisco Bay Area at any moment. And when it does, the city can expect to be slammed with a force equal to hundreds of atomic bombs.</p> <p>Porter said the shaking will quickly cut off power in many areas. That means unsuspecting people will be trapped between floors in elevators without backup power. At peak commute times, the number of those trapped could be in the thousands.</p> <p>To escape, the survivors of the initial quake will need the help of firefighters with specialized training and tools. But their rescuers won't come – at least not right away. Firefighters will be battling infernos that could outnumber the region's fire engines.</p> <p>Running water will be in short supply. Cellphone service may not work at all. The aftershocks will keep coming. And the electricity could remain off for weeks.</p> <p>"That means people are dead in those elevators," Porter said.</p> <p>'Problems on the horizon'</p> <p>The situation Porter described comes from his work on HayWired Scenario, a detailed look at the cascading calamities that will occur when a major earthquake strikes the Bay Area's Hayward Fault, including the possibility of widespread power outages that will strand elevators.</p> <p>The disaster remains theoretical for now. But the United States Geological Survey estimates a 51% chance that a quake as big as the one described in HayWired will occur in the region within three decades.</p> <p>It's one of several West Coast disasters so likely that researchers have prepared painstakingly detailed scenarios in an attempt to ready themselves.</p> <p>The experts who worked on the projects are highly confident the West Coast could at any moment face disasters with the destructive power to kill hundreds or thousands of people and forever change the lives of millions more. They also say there's more that can be done to keep individuals – and society – safer.</p> <p>"We're trying to have an earthquake without having one," Anne Wein told USA TODAY. Wein is a USGS researcher who co-leads the HayWired earthquake scenario and has worked on several other similar projects.</p> <p>Such disaster scenarios are massive undertakings that bring together experts from various fields who otherwise would have little reason to work together – seismologists, engineers, emergency responders and social scientists.</p> <p>That's important because "it's difficult to make new relationships in a crisis," Wein said.</p> <p>Similar projects aimed at simulating a future disaster have turned out to be hauntingly accurate.</p> <p>The Hurricane Pam scenario foretold many of the devastating consequences of a major hurricane striking New Orleans well before Hurricane Katrina hit the city.</p> <p>More recently, in 2017, the authors of "The SPARS Pandemic" called their disaster scenario "futuristic." But now the project now reads like a prophecy of COVID-19. Johns Hopkins University even issued a statement saying the 89-page document was not intended as a prediction of COVID-19.</p>

“The SPARS Pandemic” imagined a future where a deadly novel coronavirus spread around the world, often without symptoms, as disinformation and vaccine hesitancy constantly confounded experts’ efforts to keep people safe.

The “SPARS scenario, which is fiction, was meant to give public health communicators a leg up ... Think through problems on the horizon,” author Monica Schoch-Spana told USA TODAY.

At the time that SPARS was written, a global pandemic was thought of in much the same way experts currently describe the HayWired earthquake: an imminent catastrophe that could arrive at any time.

'It could happen tomorrow'

Disaster scenario researchers each have their own way of describing how likely the apocalyptic futures they foresee are.

"The probability (of) this earthquake is 100%, if you give me enough time," seismologist Lucy Jones will often say.

Earthquakes occurring along major faults are a certainty, but scientists can't predict exactly when earthquakes will happen – the underground forces that create them are too random and chaotic. But researchers know a lot about what will happen once the earth begins to shake.

Earthquakes like HayWired are “worth planning for,” Porter said. Because “it could happen tomorrow.” “We don’t know when,” Porter said. But “it will happen.”

Wein says we're “overdue for preparedness.” You might say we're also overdue for a major West Coast disaster. The kind of earthquake described in HayWired historically occurs every 100-220 years. And it's been more than 153 years since the last one.

Farther south in California, it's difficult to pin down exactly how at risk Los Angeles is for The Big One – the infamous theoretical earthquake along the San Andreas fault that will devastate the city. But a massive magnitude 7.5 earthquake has about a 1 in 3 chance of striking the Los Angeles area in the next 30 years, [the United States Geological Survey](#) estimates.

[A 2008 scenario said](#) a magnitude 7.8 quake could cause nearly 2,000 deaths and more than \$200 billion in economic losses. Big quakes in Los Angeles are particularly devastating because the soil holding up the city will turn into [a "bowl of jelly," according to a post published by catastrophe modeling company Temblor](#).

[Another scenario](#) warns that a stretch of coast in Oregon and Washington state is capable of producing an earthquake much more powerful than the ones California is bracing for. Parts of coastline would suddenly drop 6 feet, [shattering critical bridges](#), destroying undersea communication cables and producing a tsunami.

Thousands are expected to die, but [local leaders are considering projects that could give coastal residents a better chance at survival](#).

It too “could happen at any time,” the scenario says.

Earthquake scenarios often focus on major coastal cities, but West Coast residents farther inland also have yet another disaster to brace for.

[“Megastorms are California's other Big One,”](#) the ARkStorm scenario says. It warns of a statewide flood that will cause more than a million evacuations and devastate California's agriculture.

Massive storms that dump rain on California for weeks on end historically happen every few hundred years. The last one hit around the time of the Civil War, when weeks of rain turned portions of the state “into an inland sea.”

'Decades to rebuild'

Whether the next disaster to strike the West Coast is a flood, an earthquake or something else, scenario experts warn that the impacts will reverberate for years or longer.

"It takes decades to rebuild," Wein said. "You have to think about a decade at least."

A major West Coast earthquake isn't just damaged buildings and cracked roads.

It's weeks or months without running water in areas with millions of people. It's mass migrations away from ruined communities. It's thousands of uninhabitable homes.

Depending on the scenario, thousands of people are expected to die. Hundreds of thousands more could be left without shelter. And those impacts will be a disproportionately felt.

California already has a housing and homelessness crisis, and Nnenia Campbell said the next disaster is set to only magnify existing inequalities. Campbell is the deputy director of the The William Averette Anderson Fund, which works to mitigate disasters for minority communities.

Campbell doesn't talk about "natural disasters" because there's nothing natural about the way a major earthquake will harm vulnerable communities more than wealthy ones.

[Human decisions like redlining](#) have led to many of the inequities in our society, she said. But humans can also still make decisions that will help make our response to the next disaster more equitable.

Many of those choices need to be made by local leaders and emergency management planners. Investing in infrastructure programs that will make homes in minority communities less vulnerable to earthquakes. Understanding how important a library is to unhoused people. Making sure all schools are built to withstand a disaster. Keeping public spaces open, even during an emergency.

But individuals can make a difference as well, Campbell said. You can [complete training](#) that will prepare you to help your community in the event of an emergency. Or you can [join a mutual aid network](#), a group where community members work together to help each other.

Community support is a common theme among disaster experts: One of the best ways to prepare is to know and care about your neighbors.

If everyone only looks out for themselves in the next disaster, "we are going to have social breakdown," Jones said.

What you can do

Experts acknowledge you'll want to make sure you and your family are safe before being able to help others.

Fortunately, many disaster preparedness precautions are inexpensive and will help in a wide range of emergency situations.

Be prepared to have your access to electricity or water cut off for days or weeks.

For electricity, you'll at least want a flashlight and a way to charge your phone.

While cell service will be jammed immediately after a major earthquake, communications will likely slowly come back online faster than other services, Wein said. (And when trying to use your phone, [text](#) – [don't call](#). In a disaster, text messages are more reliable and strain cell networks less.)

To power your phone, you can cheaply buy a combination weather radio, flashlight and hand-crank charger to keep your cell running even without power for days.

A cash reserve is good to have, too, Jones said. You'll want to be able to buy things, even if your credit card doesn't work for a time.

Preparing for earthquakes specifically is important along the West Coast, too, experts said. Simple things like securing bookshelves can save lives. [Downloading an early warning app](#) can give you precious moments to protect yourself in the event a big quake. Buying earthquake insurance can protect homeowners. And taking part in [a yearly drill](#) can help remind you about other easy steps you can take to prepare.

There's even more you could do to ready yourself for a catastrophe, but many disaster experts are hesitant to rely on individuals' ability to prepare themselves.

Just as health experts have begged Americans to use masks and vaccines to [help keep others safe during the pandemic](#), disaster scenario experts believe community members will need to look out for one another when the next disaster strikes.

Telling people to prepare as if "nobody is coming to help you" is a self-fulfilling prophecy, Jones said.

For now, policymakers hold the real power in how prepared society will be for the next disaster. And there's many problems to fix, according to Porter.

It's things like upgrading a city's plumbing, because many aging and brittle water pipes will shatter in a major earthquake, cutting off water to communities for weeks or months.

"Shake it, and it breaks," Porter said.

Getting ready for the next big earthquake means mundane improvements like even [stricter building codes](#), [emergency water supply systems](#) for firefighters and retrofitting elevators with emergency power.

Just that change alone could prevent thousands of people from being trapped in elevators when the big San Francisco earthquake comes.

"A lot of that suffering can be avoided," Porter said.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Tribe: potential unmarked school graves
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/02/americas/canada-indigenous-residential-school-potential-graves-st-bernard-mission/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Officials uncovered 169 potential unmarked graves on the grounds of a former Catholic residential school in Canada, an Indigenous tribe in Alberta said Tuesday.</p> <p>The Kapawe'no First Nation, which is located over 200 miles northwest of Edmonton, said the discovery was made at the former St. Bernard Mission School at the Grouard Mission site. The potential graves were identified using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and drone imagery, officials said.</p> <p>The residential school was one of several in Canada that thousands of mostly Indigenous children were forced to attend after being separated from their families between the 19th century and the 1990s. At least 150,000 Indigenous children from across the country were affected by the practice, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has said.</p> <p>"We remember the devastation our people felt when our children were forcibly removed from their families, communities to be placed in Indian residential schools," Kapawe'no Chief Sydney Halcrow said during a news conference Tuesday. "We can start our journey of healing our identities that they fought so hard to take from us."</p>

Halcrow said information from survivors, community members and archival records indicates several children died during their time at the school. The Catholic Church opened St. Bernard Mission School in 1894 and it closed in 1961, according to Canada's [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#).

The investigation to find unmarked graves of children who reportedly died at the school began in October 2021 through a joint effort from the Kapawe'no First Nation and the Institute of Prairie and Indigenous Archaeology (IPIA) at the University of Alberta.

"Hundred sixty-nine potential graves were identified based on analysis on anomalies within the GPR data that had characteristics associated with unmarked graves," IPIA Director Kisha Supernant said.

Over the course of six days, 115 potential graves were found inside the existing community cemetery where no grave markers were found, according to Supernant. Additionally, 54 potential graves were located around the school property, outside of the cemetery area.

The investigation is expected to continue in two additional phases, Supernant said.

An Indian Residential School Crisis Line is available 24/7 for former students and others affected at 1-866-925-4419.

Hundreds of unmarked graves identified at other schools

The painful discovery of the potential unmarked graves comes after hundreds of Indigenous children's remains were found at several sites last year amid a reckoning of how Canada had treated First Nations communities.

Estimates indicate more than 4,000 children died while in residential schools over a period of several decades, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission wrote in a [2015 report](#) on the legacy of the residential school system. It detailed decades of physical, sexual and emotional abuse suffered by children in government and church-run institutions.

"These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture -- the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society," the report said.

In May 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc community confirmed [remains of 215 children](#) who attended the Kamloops Indian Residential School were found. A month later, the Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan announced the discovery of at least [750 unmarked graves](#) on the grounds of the former Marieval Indian Residential School.

In British Columbia, [182 human remains](#) in unmarked graves were found in July 2021 at the site of the former St. Eugene's Mission School near the city of Cranbrook, the Lower Kootenay Band, a member band of the Ktunaxa Nation, said.

Last year, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops apologized for its role in the residential school system and expressed "profound remorse."

"We acknowledge the grave abuses that were committed by some members of our Catholic community; physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and sexual," the organization said in a [statement](#). "We also sorrowfully acknowledge the historical and ongoing trauma and the legacy of suffering and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples that continue to this day."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia military 40-mile-long convoy stalls?
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/03/europe/russian-convoy-stalled-outside-kyiv-intl/index.html

GIST	<p>(CNN)For days, residents of Kyiv had been bracing themselves for a 40-mile-long convoy of Russian tanks, armored vehicles, and towed artillery to arrive for an assault on the Ukrainian capital.</p> <p>Days later, they're still waiting.</p> <p>On Thursday, the UK's defense ministry said the convoy appears to have stalled some 30 kilometers (19 miles) outside Kyiv and has made "little discernible progress" over the past three days, citing intelligence.</p> <p>"The main body of the large Russian column advancing on Kyiv remains over 30km from the center of the city, having been delayed by staunch Ukrainian resistance, mechanical breakdown and congestion. The column has made little discernible progress in over three days," the UK statement said.</p> <p>Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday night that while the convoy and Russia's broader push towards Kyiv "remains stalled," there was a significant concern "that maybe the window is closing to be able to get aid into cities that may become under siege."</p> <p>A senior US defense official told reporters on that although the convoy is suffering shortages of fuel and food, the US has assessed that the Russians "will again learn from these missteps and these stumbles and will try to overcome them."</p> <p>The convoy's stalled progress could create multiple strategic problems for Russia.</p> <p>First, as the key Russian supply line for any major assault on Kyiv, it is a very large sitting target for Ukrainian forces fighting back against the invasion.</p> <p>Second, sitting in a 40-mile-long traffic jam for days at a time could take its toll on the morale and discipline of Russian soldiers ahead of a major military operation.</p> <p>Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky claimed on Wednesday night that the fierce Ukrainian resistance had dented Russian morale.</p> <p>"More and more occupiers are fleeing back to Russia, from us, from you ... we are a nation that broke the enemy's plans in a week — plans those have been built for years," he said in a Facebook post.</p> <p>The latest assessments on the convoy comes after the Russian military issued its first casualty figures from the war, saying 498 of its troops had died and another 1,597 had been injured. The UK statement on Thursday said "the actual number of those killed and wounded will almost certainly be considerably higher and continue to rise."</p> <p>Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov expressed "great sorrow" over Russian military casualties on Thursday morning.</p> <p>But Russia appeared to be meeting less resistance in southern Ukraine, where the mayor of the strategically important city of Kherson on the Black Sea indicated that Russian forces had seized control, though claims remain disputed.</p> <p>And the crucial southeastern Ukrainian city of Mariupol came under siege from Russian forces Thursday, as Moscow seeks to tighten its grip on the south of the country.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Warning: get ready \$5 gas price
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/gas-prices-5-dollars-gallon-russia-ukraine/
GIST	Americans can expect increasing pain at the pump as rising oil costs continue to push up prices at gas stations across the U.S. That spike is unlikely to ease anytime soon as Russia's war with Ukraine intensifies , experts say.

The current national average price of gas is \$3.61 a gallon, up 26 cents from February and roughly a dollar from a year ago, according to data from AAA. In U.S. states with the priciest fuel, motorists already are paying nearly \$4.50 a gallon, according to price tracker [GasBuddy](#).

Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, tweeted on Monday that the average gas price in some U.S. cities will reach \$5 a gallon "in the next couple of weeks."

California has the highest average gas prices, at \$4.80 per gallon, followed by Hawaii, at \$4.52, and Nevada, at \$4.02. Nationally, the highest ever average price for gas across the U.S. was \$4.11, in July 2008, according to [AAA](#).

We're getting closer to seeing our first ever major city gas price average reach \$5/gal:

San Francisco \$4.92

Los Angeles \$4.88

Oakland \$4.86

San Jose \$4.85

San Diego \$4.84

It will happen in the next couple weeks.

— Patrick De Haan  (@GasBuddyGuy) [March 1, 2022](#)

The average cost per gallon among the lowest 10% of stations around the U.S. is \$3.14 per gallon, a 10-cent increase from last week, according to GasBuddy.

Fueling inflation

Oil prices surged another \$7 per barrel on Wednesday after an agreement by the U.S. and other major governments [to release 60 million barrels](#) from their national reserves — half of them U.S. barrels — failed to quell supply concerns over Russia's attack on Ukraine. The price of Brent crude oil, the international benchmark, rose to nearly \$113 a barrel on Wednesday, its highest level since 2014. The U.S. benchmark topped \$107, according to Bloomberg.

The decision made by the 31 member nations of the International Energy Agency was intended "to send a strong message to oil markets" that there will be "no shortfall in supplies" as a result of the invasion of Ukraine, but failed to move markets.

"Markets dismissed the notion that 60 million barrels of strategic reserves released will be consequential to the risks of Russian supply jeopardized," Tan Boon Heng of Mizuho Bank said in a report. "Russia pumps more than that in just six days."

Russia is a [major exporter of crude oil](#), accounting for about 12% of the world's supply. Any disruption to those exports is likely to drive prices at the pump higher for consumers, experts said.

"We think the Russia-Ukraine war will intensify global and U.S. inflation pressures by pushing up oil and gas prices," Brian Coulton, chief economist with credit rating agency Fitch, said in an email.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Oil tops \$115, stock futures wobble
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-stocks-markets-dow-update-03-03-2022-11646296452?mod=hp_lead_pos1
GIST	U.S. stock futures crept down while oil prices continued to surge, as investors monitored Russia's invasion of Ukraine and how a jump in commodities prices is likely to impact inflation and the Federal Reserve's monetary policy.

Futures for the S&P 500 edged down 0.1% Thursday. The broad-market index shot up Wednesday. Contracts for the tech-focused Nasdaq-100 declined 0.4% and futures for the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 0.2% Thursday.

Crude prices surged over \$115 a barrel for the first time since 2008, as refiners balked at buying Russian oil, reducing the global energy supply. Brent-crude futures, the international benchmark, rose 3.5% to \$116.93 a barrel. Investors are worried that a prolonged elevation in oil prices could precede a combination of slowing growth and higher inflation, known as stagflation.

“The inflationary impact of oil and natural gas surges is clear. Inflation is going to be stickier. Interest rates will be pushed up by central banks worried about inflation and that will be bad for growth,” said Edward Park, chief investment officer at U.K. investment firm Brooks Macdonald. “Stagflation is the big concern for 2023.”

European natural-gas prices rose 8%, adding to a surge this week. Investors are worried that supply of natural gas could be disrupted to Europe as a result of the war. About a third of Russian gas exports to Europe flow through Ukraine, according to analysts.

Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine has injected volatility into broader markets. Investors are trying to assess how a shunning of Russian commodities, including oil, will feed into already elevated inflation and how aggressively central banks will raise interest rates when faced with additional price pressures and an uncertain economic outlook. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Wednesday he would [propose a quarter-percentage point rate increase](#) at the central bank’s meeting in two weeks.

The pan-continental Stoxx Europe 600 fell 0.2% Thursday. Russian stock markets [remained closed](#) for the fourth consecutive day as the government seeks to limit a firesale, having also imposed capital controls on the ruble.

The [London Stock Exchange Group](#) has suspended trading in more than 50 Russian stocks. Index providers [MSCI Inc.](#) and FTSE Russell have said they will cut Russian equities from their benchmarks next week and S&P Dow Jones Indices is considering doing the same.

The ruble dropped 11.6% Thursday against the greenback to 116 rubles to the dollar, according to [FactSet](#). Traders say investors’ and brokers’ unwillingness to touch the currency has limited the ease with which they can trade it. Currencies of nearby countries have fallen against the dollar as well, as investors worry about economic spillover. The Polish zloty fell 0.8% Thursday, and the Hungarian forint declined 0.7%.

In U.S. bond markets, the yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note ticked up to 1.870% from 1.862% Wednesday. Yields and prices move inversely.

Major stock indexes in Asia largely gained. South Korea’s Kospi jumped 1.6% and Japan’s Nikkei 225 rose 0.7%. China’s Shanghai Composite fell 0.1%.

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HEADLINE	03/02 China’s plight: learning to live with Covid
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-weighs-methods-for-relaxing-zero-covid-19-grip-bubbles-drugs-and-new-messaging-11646230580?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>China, the last major country to stick with a zero-tolerance approach to Covid-19, is now actively exploring ways to loosen controls.</p> <p>In preparation for a potential opening, Chinese officials are looking into the use of travel bubbles modeled on measures taken during the Winter Olympics, collecting data on new antiviral drugs and scouting sites abroad for future production of homegrown Chinese mRNA vaccines, according to people familiar with the matter.</p>

Covid-19 controls likely won't be eased before next spring, according to two of the people, but experimental opening measures could arrive in select cities as early as this summer.

Chinese public health experts have recently started to discuss some of the efforts publicly, part of an effort to prepare Chinese people to live with a virus the country has spent two years [trying mightily to eradicate](#).

"In the near future, at an appropriate time, there will be a Chinese-style roadmap for living with the virus," Zeng Guang, China's former chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Prevention and Control, wrote on China's [Twitter](#) -like [Weibo](#) on Monday.

Officials in departments covering transportation, customs and border control have been tasked since January with exploring adjustments to Covid-19 control policies that can eventually be presented to China's top leadership, according to a person with knowledge of the pandemic discussions in Beijing.

The approach and timeline for a relaxation of Covid-19 controls aren't fixed and could change depending on future developments, such as the emergence of a new variant of the virus, the people say.

In response to a request for comment, China's National Health Commission pointed to an interview last month in which Liang Wannian, head of the commission's Covid-19 task force, said that "dynamic clearing"—Beijing's preferred term for its current Covid-19 control strategy—is "definitely not something that will continue forever."

China faces immense challenges in trying to calibrate its Covid-19 containment system in a way that avoids overwhelmed hospitals and large numbers of excess deaths.

Since the pandemic first exploded in the Chinese city of Wuhan in early 2020, Chinese leaders have continued to stick with an effective but laborious combination of digital surveillance, tight border controls, mass testing and targeted lockdowns to prevent and suppress larger outbreaks.

Chinese health officials have been closely monitoring Hong Kong, where an Omicron outbreak has spiraled out of control despite stringent border controls and social-distancing rules, and is spreading quickly among the city's unvaccinated elderly.

Mainland experts now see the former British colony as a "stress test scenario," as well as a source of data on the effectiveness of various treatments and insight into fighting severe infection surges without resorting to hard lockdowns, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

The sight of patients lying on gurneys in the open air as they waited for treatment in overwhelmed Hong Kong hospitals has struck a nerve in mainland China. While the mainland's more affluent cities have responded to a government directive to beef up healthcare systems to contend with the pandemic, conditions are still basic in the countryside, where more than one third of China's population live.

In 2020, a team of health experts looking into critical-care bed capacity in Asia found China had 3.6 critical care beds per 100,000 people. The U.S., in comparison, has almost 30 beds per 100,000 people, according to the Society of Critical Care Medicine, a Mount Prospect, Ill., nonprofit.

Following the success of the so-called "closed loop" at the Beijing Winter Olympics, where visitors were tested daily and sealed off from the rest of the city through separate accommodation and transportation links, Chinese health officials are considering it as a template for other cities, according to one of the people familiar with the discussions.

Similar bubbles could be used for sports competitions and conferences, and possibly also set up to facilitate travel to and from certain countries, researchers with the Beijing municipal CDC argued in a recent paper.

Other opening proposals being considered include quarantine exemptions for fully vaccinated international travelers and special entry arrangements for international students, according to one of the people familiar with the discussions.

One important step towards easing Zero-Covid measures, according to one of the people, was China's conditional approval last month for emergency use of Pfizer Inc.'s Covid-19 antiviral drug Paxlovid. If approved for general use, the drug potentially gives Chinese health authorities a vital tool for the treatment of breakthrough infections, the person said.

Chinese regulators are awaiting more data from Pfizer and still need to negotiate the pricing before giving the green light, the person said. Pfizer said it is searching for manufacturing partners to help produce the drug.

The development and introduction of China's homegrown mRNA vaccines could give China another tool that would allow for a relaxation of controls. China currently has one mRNA vaccine candidate in Phase 3 trials, with two other candidates undergoing Phase 2 trials. Chinese officials have been in talks with Asian and European countries, looking for a manufacturing site to start producing Chinese mRNA vaccines as early as this summer, according to a person familiar with the discussions.

A potential pitfall for China, currently vividly on display in Hong Kong, is the public's attitude toward infections, said Mengji Lu, a virologist at the University of Essen-Duisburg in Germany.

The current Chinese protocol is to send every positive case, regardless of severity, to a medical facility for treatment, which he warns would inundate hospitals in the event of a larger outbreak. Solving the problem will require not only changing the policy but also persuading people not to fear mild Covid-19 infections.

"Hospitals can treat patients," Mr. Lu said. "But they cannot fight panic."

University research into Chinese citizens' views of the virus and attitudes toward social controls suggests the country hasn't built up a strong enough psychological tolerance for the virus to open the country's borders, according to people familiar with the discussions.

"The tolerance will need to be higher than it is now, but it will also be much lower than is currently the case in Western countries," the person said.

In order for life to return to normal, Covid-19's case fatality rate—the percentage of people who die from an infection—needs to be similar to that of influenza, around 0.1%, one of China's most prominent public health officials said in December.

In recent weeks, Chinese public-health experts have begun publicly citing data that shows an Omicron infection is roughly as dangerous as the flu for most under-60-year-olds, though they also point to worrying data for older patients.

For unvaccinated people over 60 years old, the case fatality rate is 2.65%, rising to 21.5% for unvaccinated people over 80 years old, Zhang Wenhong, a public health expert described in state media as "China's Anthony Fauci," wrote on Weibo, referring to data from the U.K. Health Security Agency.

Although nearly 90% of China's population is fully vaccinated, barely half of the country's 35.8 million citizens over 80 years old are, according to official data. Local officials so far have shied away from pushing the elderly to get shots for fear of being held responsible for adverse reactions, one of the people familiar with the matter said.

	“China will eventually have to figure out for itself how many Covid-deaths it can tolerate,” the University of Essen-Duisburg’s Mr. Lu said. “The range will be set by social consensus. But the final decision will be a political one.”
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HEADLINE	03/02 Fed on track to raise rates in two weeks
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/powell-says-fed-is-on-track-to-raise-rates-in-two-weeks-11646227811?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said he would propose a quarter-percentage point rate increase at the central bank’s meeting in two weeks amid high inflation, strong economic demand and a tight labor market, offering an unusually explicit preview of anticipated policy action.</p> <p>Mr. Powell said Wednesday that, before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last week, he expected the central bank would follow that initial rate rise with a series of increases this year.</p> <p>“For now, I would say that we will proceed carefully along the lines of that plan,” Mr. Powell told the House Financial Services Committee on Wednesday. “We’re going to avoid adding uncertainty to what is already an extraordinarily challenging and uncertain moment.”</p> <p>While it was too soon to say how the war and heavy sanctions imposed by the West against Moscow would influence the U.S. economy, he revealed general urgency to continue tightening policy.</p> <p>The S&P 500 rose 1.9% Wednesday, a day after the index fell 1.6%. Yields on benchmark 10-year Treasury notes have been especially volatile. They rose to 1.862%, from 1.708% Tuesday and 1.836% on Monday.</p> <p>Mr. Powell effectively ended a debate in markets and among other Fed officials over whether they would lift rates from zero this month with a larger half-percentage-point increase. At the same time, he laid the groundwork for the possibility of half-point increases this summer, pushing back against the idea that more traditional quarter-point increases represent a speed limit for the Fed.</p> <p>Consumer prices in January rose 6.1% from a year earlier, according to the Fed’s preferred gauge. Excluding volatile food and energy categories, so-called core inflation rose 5.2%, close to a 40-year high. “This is strong, high inflation, and it’s very important that we get on top of it, and that’s exactly what we’re going to do,” Mr. Powell told lawmakers.</p> <p>Mr. Powell said his colleagues expected inflation to peak and diminish soon. “To the extent inflation comes in higher or is more persistently high than that, then we would be prepared to move more aggressively” by raising rates by a half percentage point at one or more meetings later this year. The Fed hasn’t raised rates by a half point since 2000.</p> <p>Mr. Powell said he expected the Fed would also make “good progress” preparing its plans to shrink its \$9 trillion asset portfolio, but that it wouldn’t finalize those plans at its March 15-16 meeting.</p> <p>The global economy has been recovering from a series of “supply shocks,” in which shortages of goods or services drive up their prices. Textbooks call for central banks not to react to one-off increases in prices that result from temporary factors, such as natural disasters, and to instead focus on broader underlying inflation pressures.</p> <p>Officials are turning anxious, however, about an overheated labor market with wage gains well above their pre-pandemic highs, and the risk that consumers and businesses will expect bigger price increases in the future, fostering persistently higher inflation.</p> <p>Fed officials last spring and summer attributed most of the rise in inflation to supply-chain bottlenecks, which wouldn’t necessarily demand a policy response if those kinks were expected to resolve</p>

themselves in a few months. On Wednesday, Mr. Powell suggested high inflation was resulting from the collision of both strong demand and supply constraints. The emphasis on demand is important because Fed interest-rate increases can bring supply and demand into balance by slowing down hiring and economic activity more broadly.

Mr. Powell said a shortage of workers was driving up wages, and the Fed was watching carefully for signs that the war in Ukraine would further drive up prices. The Fed wouldn't have to raise rates as much, he said, if bottlenecks eased and more workers returned to the labor market.

"Honestly, we have the tools and we will use them to get inflation under control, but to the extent we get help from the supply side, it'll make that job so much easier," he said.

His remarks underscore the challenge facing the central bank as it prepares to raise interest rates for the first time since 2018. During geopolitical shocks, the Fed generally avoids taking steps that increase uncertainty. But with inflation running far above its 2% target and the Ukrainian crisis threatening to push prices even higher, the Fed could feel more pressure to raise rates.

While Russia's direct trade links to the U.S. economy aren't significant, Mr. Powell cited the risk of unintended and downstream effects of rising prices for oil, natural gas, and other commodities for which Russia is a major exporter including neon, palladium, wheat and fertilizer. "Events like a war...will drive up the price of oil and gas, and that'll get into prices certainly," he said.

Lawmakers pressed Mr. Powell on the Fed's previous view that inflation pressures would abate more quickly on their own last year.

Rep. Andy Barr (R., Ky.) said the central bank should have removed stimulus faster after congressional Democrats and the White House approved a \$2 trillion spending program one year ago. "Do you and your colleagues concede now in hindsight that the overly accommodative monetary stance for too long was a mistake?" he asked.

Mr. Powell said that was for others to determine. "I always thought there was a chance we'd be wrong, and that if we were wrong, we'd be able to pivot, and we did pivot, and we pivoted pretty quickly" last December, he said. "But by then, the economy really was moving very, very fast."

Democrats, meanwhile, appeared divided about how the Fed should respond. Some asked why Mr. Powell hadn't moved faster to withdraw stimulus last year, while others hinted at concerns the Fed was overreacting to events beyond its control.

Mr. Powell said the labor market was strong enough that the economy should be able to withstand higher rates. He said he was hopeful the economy could slow enough to slow rising prices and wages without producing a recession or a period of high inflation like one witnessed in the 1970s—a so-called soft landing.

Later, Rep. Ritchie Torres (D., N.Y.) pressed Mr. Powell over whether the Fed's response might backfire, causing a recession without bringing down inflation. Mr. Powell returned to the objective of a soft landing. "There are no guarantees in life," he said. "But that is our intention, and what we propose to do."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia's credit rating cut to junk
SOURCE	https://www.marketwatch.com/story/russias-credit-rating-cut-to-junk-by-moodys-and-fitch-11646305348?mod=hp_minor_pos25&adobe_mc=MC MID%3D60782760848012254363262523340509769761%7CMCORGID%3DCB68E4BA55144CAA0A4C98A5%2540AdobeOrg%7CTS%3D1646306849

GIST	<p>Russia's credit ratings were downgraded deep into junk territory by Moody's Investors Service and Fitch Ratings, with the duo highlighting the economic toll inflicted by wide-ranging sanctions and rising doubts about whether Moscow will honor its debts.</p> <p>"The severity of international sanctions in response to Russia's military invasion of Ukraine has heightened macro-financial stability risks, represents a huge shock to Russia's credit fundamentals and could undermine its willingness to service government debt," Fitch said in a statement issued late Wednesday U.S. time.</p> <p>Both credit-rating companies cut their assessment of Russia by six notches, to a single-B rating in Fitch's case and to B3 for Moody's. The two rating firms, which had previously given Russia low investment-grade ratings of BBB and Baa3, respectively, both signaled further downgrades could follow.</p> <p>Fitch warned that sanctions on Russian banks were likely to be ratcheted up. It also cautioned that Western sanctions, plus the large fall in the ruble USDRUB, 14.19%, "markedly increase the risk of a broad-based loss of domestic confidence triggering bank deposit outflows and dollarisation."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Battles escalate across Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/03/russia-ukraine-war-putin-news/
GIST	<p>Battles escalated across Ukraine on Thursday as Russia laid siege to major cities, stepping up assaults in the face of fierce Ukrainian resistance. Explosions continued to rock the capital, Kyiv, lighting up the sky as air raid sirens sounded and a massive convoy of Russian ground forces remained within 20 miles of the city's center.</p> <p>Moscow's troops have pushed into the Black Sea port city of Kherson — where Russian state media said Kremlin forces had taken control, but Ukrainian defense officials were adamant that the fight rages on. Russian troops filled the streets and stormed into the city council building, according to the mayor, but "the flag above us is Ukrainian," he wrote on Facebook.</p> <p>The Ukrainian response, bolstered by scrappy civilian militias, continues to slow its opponent's advance. After days of heavy shelling, Ukraine has defied the odds to hold cities under fire, including Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Mariupol, according to the British Defense Ministry — as the Russian convoy pointed toward Kyiv struggles with low morale and botched planning. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was defiant on Thursday: "So many times they wanted to destroy us. But they couldn't. Wanted to wipe us from the face of the earth. But weren't successful. Beat our backs. But we are standing on our feet."</p> <p>Just over 1 million people have fled Ukraine since the Russian invasion began, according to data from the U.N. refugee agency — an exodus that is set to become Europe's worst humanitarian crisis this century. That figure already matches the number of refugees who were displaced from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan in 2015. The International Criminal Court has opened an investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine, the intergovernmental organization's prosecutor said in a statement.</p> <p>Here's what to know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The International Paralympic Committee on Thursday reversed an earlier decision that would have allowed Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete at the Beijing Games set to begin Friday. IPC President Andrew Parsons said that while the organization believes sports and politics should not mix, it has come under pressure from an "overwhelming number of members." • Russia's Defense Ministry said 498 service members have died and more than 1,500 have been wounded in the fighting. It's the first time Russian officials have conceded the invasion's high toll on its troops — though there is no way to verify the count. • The United Nations recorded 227 civilian deaths as of Wednesday, including 15 children, and warned that the true numbers were probably much higher.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Pentagon is delaying a test of the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile that was planned for this week, in an effort to show that the United States is “a responsible nuclear power.”
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HEADLINE	03/02 Russia invasion veers history new direction
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/03/02/one-week-of-war-in-ukraine/
GIST	<p>In one week of war, life within the boundaries of Ukraine has been upended, but the brutal assault Russian President Vladimir Putin launched last Thursday has also reverberated around the globe, steering history in a new direction and switching up 75 years of relations among some of the world’s most powerful and wealthy countries.</p> <p>In Germany, hundreds of thousands marched in support of the NATO alliance’s firm stance against Russia’s aggression. Berlin decided to send military aid to Ukraine — a dramatic about-face in a country that for more than seven decades has shied away from military involvements as a kind of penance for the Nazi genocide and World War II.</p> <p>Throughout Europe — even in staunchly neutral Switzerland — countries that depend heavily on Russia to heat people’s homes and power their economies banded together to isolate and punish the Russians for their aggression. Countries that just a few years ago rose up in protest over the arrival of migrants fleeing wars and extremism in the Middle East and North Africa are suddenly welcoming hundreds of thousands of refugees.</p> <p>In the United States, the invasion created a brief, almost disorienting moment of unity, as Democrats and Republicans alike — with the prominent exceptions of former president Donald Trump and some of his hardcore supporters in the media and politics — denounced Putin and embraced the Biden administration’s crippling sanctions against Russia.</p> <p>“In the battle between democracy and autocracies, democracies are rising to the moment, and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security,” President Biden declared Tuesday night in his State of the Union address.</p> <p>In one week, the war in Ukraine has focused the world’s attention away from the coronavirus pandemic, away from inflation and supply chain problems, and away from more chronic problems such as climate change.</p> <p>Regional wars often have a way of wreaking havoc well beyond the battlefields; Syria’s civil war, for example, similarly sucked in the United States, Western European powers and Russia. But the war in Ukraine has almost instantly restructured global power dynamics, in part because of Putin’s nuclear saber-rattling and in part because the world has become so much more interconnected in recent years — in trade, technology, media and politics.</p> <p>“In less than one week, you’ve seen a fundamental shift as Europeans realize they have to take on more responsibility for their own defense,” said Steven Pifer, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine who is now a fellow at Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Cooperation. “In less than one week, you’ve seen five decades of German attitudes toward Russia turned on their head.”</p> <p>One day before the Russian invasion, Pifer said, “no one would have predicted this much change: the unity around strong sanctions against Russia, the German about-face, the Swiss joining the European Union in its sanctions, the American people rallying around the Ukrainians,” even across party and ideological lines.</p> <p>Countries with strong ties to Russia have declined to join Western nations in imposing sanctions on Moscow but have not fully endorsed Putin’s move, either. India, which relies on Moscow for most of its advanced weaponry, abstained from a United Nations vote to condemn the invasion. China called for a</p>

negotiated end to the conflict, though its foreign minister, Wang Yi, said that “the Chinese side understands Russia’s legitimate security concerns.”

Putin’s aggression has put China hawks in the United States on guard. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.) on Tuesday night called for the United States to step up military support for Taiwan, so China doesn’t view the war in Ukraine as a sign that now is the time to move against the island.

None of the concerted actions against Moscow has so far dislodged Putin from his goal of overthrowing Ukraine’s democratically elected government and forcing the former Soviet republic state back into the Russian orbit. But in addition to isolating Russia from the world community and delivering an economic and geopolitical wallop to one of the planet’s three primary nuclear powers, the swift avalanche of nonmilitary actions against Putin has convinced many world leaders that global power dynamics have entered a phase of startling and, perhaps, enduring change.

War — and particularly the prospects of world war and nuclear conflict — has a unique power to change the behavior of people and nations. This war — viewed online around the world in searing video snippets that show Ukrainians standing up against Russian tanks and residential neighborhoods charred and shredded by Russian missiles — has turned public opinion against Putin and Russia so quickly and overwhelmingly that demonstrations, fundraising drives and boycotts of Russian goods have at times outpaced governmental actions.

Perhaps the sharpest change has come in Germany, at the center of Europe. The country at the heart of two world wars had managed, until this week, to keep its feet firmly planted in the West even as it maintained close ties with Russia. Germany simultaneously has relied on the NATO alliance to defend itself against Russia and has been highly dependent on Russian oil and gas exports.

Now, in a sudden shift brought on by the war in Ukraine, Germany has decided to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, cut off key banking ties with Russia, suspend completion of a natural gas pipeline between the two countries and boost its defense spending by an unprecedented amount.

Just a couple of weeks after German politicians who supported sending a supply of helmets to Ukraine found themselves denounced as warmongers, 78 percent of Germans in a poll published Tuesday said they now support the massive increase in defense spending — a startling number given the German public’s decades-long allergy to the use of military force abroad.

Putin’s effort to push back hard against what he sees as an American and Western European drive to dominate Europe and encroach on Russia’s traditional sphere of influence has backfired even among a German public that has long viewed Russia as a useful balance against U.S. power.

On the streets of Berlin, a crowd estimated at a half-million people demonstrated Sunday on behalf of Ukrainians, carrying signs such as “I’m ready to freeze for peace,” a reference to Germany’s reliance on Russian oil and gas for home heating. The German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock of the Green party, which has strong pacifist roots, concluded that “perhaps on this day, Germany is leaving behind a form of special and unique restraint in foreign and security policy.”

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, in office for less than three months, said the West is now living through a “Zeitenwende,” meaning a turn in the times, a new era. Such a shift was especially striking for Scholz, a Social Democrat, because as a leader of his country’s Young Socialists movement decades ago, he had spoken out against “aggressive-imperialist NATO” and called for “overcoming the capitalist economy.”

But if Russia’s war on Ukraine heralds a new time, “what is this new era?” asked Jackson Janes, president emeritus of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies at Johns Hopkins University. “Is this Cold War 2.0? There’s been a huge change in large parts of the world in one week, but is it sustainable? What if the gas gets turned off in Berlin? How long does this unity last?”

Whatever policy flips Germany makes now, “they still have to deal with the Russians,” Janes said. “The geography doesn’t change.”

If geographic proximity to the battlefield is making this war more frightening to Europeans — the arrival of nearly a million migrants fleeing Ukraine for Poland and other neighboring countries is making the war feel even closer to home for many Europeans — then geographic distance may have an opposite effect on U.S. attitudes toward the war.

“We’ll have to see how long this coalition can hold together,” Janes said. “The economic pressures — inflation, energy — aren’t going away. The Europeans are glad we are all on one page right now, but every German leader I speak to says, ‘Yeah, America’s back, but for how long?’ They’re really afraid of 2024 and a return of Trump or a Trump-like figure.”

Trump, who has strongly indicated he intends to run again for president, has long admired Putin and praised his “genius” in the run-up to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Trump also has touted his “good relationship” with the Russian president, sowing doubt that America under his leadership would counter Russia as punishingly as the Biden administration has.

The global response to the invasion has nearly paralyzed Russia’s economy, but the conflict has also rattled markets worldwide, slowing the flow of food and energy, and jeopardizing the recovery of supply chains and employment as the third year of the pandemic begins.

Although many Europeans say they’re willing to sacrifice on behalf of the besieged Ukrainians, it’s not yet clear whether that mood extends across the ocean, either in public opinion or among elected officials. Some Republicans in Congress returned for the moment to a traditional bipartisanship regarding defense policy toward a foreign war, but it was clear at Biden’s State of the Union address that any semblance of unity was fleeting, especially in an election year.

“We’re all together at this point, and we need to be together about what should be done,” Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said earlier this week.

But even Republicans who embraced Biden’s emphasis on tough sanctions against Russia made it clear that they do not intend to stop attacking Biden on all fronts, including foreign policy. “He’s letting Europe lead instead of America leading,” McCarthy told Fox News host Sean Hannity after Biden’s speech.

Even a world-rattling war doesn’t bridge the country’s cultural and political divisions, and it remains to be seen how long public opinion — now showing large majorities of Americans supporting a strong U.S. response to Russia’s aggression — will remain unified. The war in Ukraine doesn’t negate efforts by at least three consecutive U.S. presidents to shift America’s foreign policy focus toward China and Asia.

Even if the American focus on Ukraine fades with time, Russia’s role in Europe and beyond cannot be ignored. And even though the United States doesn’t depend on Russian energy, much of Europe does. Russia produces about 10 percent of the world’s oil and gas, and Russia and Ukraine export about 30 percent of the planet’s supply of wheat, so war between those countries will continue to have a destabilizing impact far from Kyiv and Kharkiv.

In much of Europe, the idea that aggressive superpowers will have their way with smaller nations was taken as a given through much of history. But after World War II and particularly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union about two years later, many Europeans believed that by banding together in a European Union and aligning themselves with Washington in NATO, they had created a new dynamic in which brute force was no longer the primary factor in how nations competed with each other.

	<p>The war in Ukraine is testing that notion severely. Even if NATO allies and other countries maintain their unity, it's not clear that their coordinated efforts against Russia will have the desired impact.</p> <p>At the least, the West has made it clear that Putin's perception of weakness and discord in the world's democracies was not wholly accurate.</p> <p>For Putin now to see a united West lining up to take tough steps against him "should logically make Putin take a step back and reconsider what he's done," Pifer said. "But his narrative for a long time has been that the West is out to get him. Unfortunately, maybe this unified response confirms that narrative in his mind."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Google workers return to office April 4
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/02/google-back-to-work/
GIST	<p>Google told workers in its San Francisco Bay area offices that they'll be expected to come back into the office April 4, more than two years after the company sent employees home at the start of the pandemic.</p> <p>The company has outlined a hybrid work model where most workers will be required to be in the office three days a week. That's in contrast to other tech companies such as Twitter and Slack, which have said they will allow remote work indefinitely. The date will also apply to some other offices in the United States, Britain and Asia, a spokesman for Google said.</p> <p>Google was one of the first major U.S. companies to send workers home in March 2020 and is seen as a corporate leader when it comes to workplace policies. The model of three days in-office and two days at home has been adopted by many other companies. Google has spent billions of dollars before and during the pandemic on massive offices in New York, London and Silicon Valley.</p> <p>"We believe that most of our teams collaborating together in the office for part of the week, and having the flexibility to work from home for the rest, is what's best for our products, customers, people and culture," John Casey, Google's vice president of global benefits, said in a letter to employees. Many workers have also applied and been granted the right to work fully remotely, Casey said.</p> <p>The pandemic prompted a massive shift in where Google's workforce lives and works. More than 14,000 Google workers around the world moved to a new office or went fully remote during the pandemic. Many of them left the Bay Area, where the company's headquarters is, and spread out across the United States.</p> <p>Last month, Google employees in North Carolina wrote a letter to management protesting changes in salary levels for their office, which they say was cut below the national average. Some workers who had moved to the area ended up leaving again when they realized their salaries were lower than they had expected them to be, Google employees told The Washington Post at the time. Google says it pays high salaries in all of the places it employs people.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Immigrant relief fund plagued by delays
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/politics/2022/03/340m-wa-immigrant-relief-fund-plagued-monthslong-delays
GIST	<p>When Washington's Legislature approved \$340 million in aid for undocumented immigrants last April, advocacy groups hailed the state as a national leader in providing pandemic relief to undocumented workers.</p> <p>More than 10 months later, none of that \$340 million has reached the wallets of the intended recipients.</p> <p>Lawmakers and some immigrant rights advocates are frustrated with the delay.</p>

“I’m disappointed,” said state Sen. Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island, the Senate’s lead budget writer.

Rolfes said she didn’t know about the holdup in issuing the immigrant relief checks until Crosscut contacted her about it last week.

Unlike U.S. citizens, people living in the country illegally weren’t eligible for unemployment benefits or federal stimulus payments, which have helped many other workers weather the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Washington state gave out some money to undocumented workers earlier in the pandemic, those past rounds of money — about \$128 million in all — reached only about 120,000 people. Washington state, meanwhile, is home to an estimated 275,000 people who lack legal residency status, many of whom never received one of those earlier \$1,000 checks.

The additional \$340 million that lawmakers put into the Washington Immigrant Relief Fund last April was supposed to help address some of those gaps. The money didn’t come out of state coffers, however, but instead came from the \$4.4 billion pot of money state officials received from the federal American Rescue Plan Act, the COVID-19 relief bill Congress approved last March.

Rolfes said she had envisioned the new round of immigrant relief checks would start going out by last fall.

Now, it looks like the state won’t even start accepting applications from undocumented workers until June.

“I assumed the funding would be getting out to the communities that need it at the time people weren’t able to go to work, or people needed sick leave, or needed to stay home with their kids when they couldn’t attend school,” said Rolfes, citing some of the difficulties people have faced because of COVID-19. “And we’re almost past that time.”

To qualify, applicants have to have been significantly impacted by the pandemic and have not qualified for unemployment or federal stimulus payments because of their immigration status. Priority is to be given to applicants who are low-income.

A change in plan

State officials say the delay in sending out the new round of immigrant relief money is largely because they needed to refocus last fall on resettling thousands of Afghan refugees.

Sarah Peterson, Washington state’s refugee coordinator, wrote in an email that between September and mid-February, the state welcomed nearly 3,000 evacuees from Afghanistan. That’s almost three times the total number of refugees the state resettled during the previous year, but crammed into only six months, she wrote.

“The pace and volume of Afghan arrivals into the state created more of an emergency situation than traditional refugee settlement,” Peterson wrote.

Peterson’s office, the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance, is tasked with both resettling refugees and administering the Immigrant Relief Fund.

In January, the office began seeking a contractor to help get the expanded Immigrant Relief Fund off the ground, work that will include launching a multilingual application website. The goal is for checks to go out between October and December, according to the agency’s request for proposals.

Jorge Barón, the executive director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, said that while he thinks people in Peterson's office "have gone above and beyond" to help refugees and undocumented workers, he "had certainly hoped this money would be out in the community much faster."

"The system is not set up to really put money out as quickly as it should," Barón said. He said he thinks that's a structural problem, and that perhaps the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance needs higher staffing levels to handle unexpected events, like the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan last year. The small, 13-member office is part of a larger agency, the state Department of Social and Health Services.

Jaime Smith, a spokesperson for Gov. Jay Inslee, said past decisions by the federal government are partly to blame for low staffing levels.

"The Trump Administration's decision to reduce the number of individuals resettled in the U.S. caused significant staffing reductions at resettlement agencies," Smith wrote in an email. That meant that, at Peterson's office, "resources were very constrained when it was announced that the U.S. would withdraw from Afghanistan," Smith wrote.

From an immigrant's perspective

Whatever the reason for the delay, it has made things tough for people like Francis, an undocumented immigrant who lives near Tacoma and works as a driver for Uber and Lyft. Francis, who fears repercussions because of his undocumented status, spoke to Crosscut on the condition that his last name not be used.

Francis, an East African immigrant in his late 40s, received one \$1,000 check from the earlier rounds of immigrant relief funding.

Had he received \$2,000 more, as he might have if the new round of funding had gone out more quickly, he said it would have helped him make ends meet as COVID-19's omicron wave surged last fall and winter. During that time, he said, his income dipped 50% to 60% some weeks as fewer people used ride-hailing services.

"You have to cut back on almost everything," said Francis, who lives with extended family members.

Had Francis had access to federal stimulus checks and unemployment benefits during earlier stages of the pandemic, as U.S. citizens did, he also might not have risked getting infected and bringing the virus home to members of his family.

As things were, however, Francis said he couldn't afford to take a few weeks off during the pandemic to protect his health while he looked for other jobs with less risk of COVID-19 exposure.

Francis said his story is typical of many undocumented workers who have kept working these past two years.

"We may be undocumented, but we keep people moving. We help everybody," he said.

The approach in other places

Other jurisdictions haven't had quite the same difficulties in distributing relief money they promised to undocumented immigrants.

New York approved a \$2.1 billion fund for undocumented workers last April. By Nov. 1, all the money was claimed, according to a report from the New York State Department of Labor.

In California, lower-income undocumented workers started getting paid within a few months of state lawmakers' approval of relief funds last February.

The city of Seattle has also distributed money to undocumented immigrants faster than the state. Last June, Seattle officials approved a new round of immigrant relief funding; by December, the city had awarded about \$22 million to 12,691 people, according to the city's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs.

Staffing differences could be a factor there. While the state's Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance has 13 full-time staffers serving immigrants across the whole state, Seattle's office has a full-time staff of 10, serving just those living within the city.

Other agencies also didn't necessarily go through a competitive bidding process like Washington state is doing. A spokesperson for the agency that handled immigrant relief payments in New York said agency staff were able to handle most of the work internally, rather than seeking an outside contractor.

Seattle city officials did use an outside contractor last year, but invoked an emergency process that meant they didn't have to seek multiple bidders, said Joaquin Uy, external affairs manager in Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs. The city contracted with a nonprofit it had used successfully before — one that had also helped the state with an earlier round of immigrant relief funding, Uy said.

Washington state officials, however, said they couldn't bypass the competitive contracting process in the same way because of state rules that apply to large awards.

The path going forward

State lawmakers are now in the final days of debating a new supplemental budget. House and Senate leaders have both proposed adding millions of dollars to help resettle Afghan refugees, as well \$18 million more to assist Ukrainian refugees, whom the state expects to arrive because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

State Rep. Timm Ormsby, the lead House budget writer, said that in light of the delays in administering the Immigrant Relief Fund, he and other lawmakers will have "direct and unvarnished conversations" with the state refugee office "about their internal capacity to offer refugee assistance," as well as the office's ability to contract out some of the work. Those conversations will be happening between now and March 10, when the Legislature is scheduled to adjourn with a final budget, he said.

"That will inform our judgment on the path going forward," said Ormsby, D-Spokane.

Rolfes, the lead Senate budget writer, said she isn't too worried about new refugee assistance money getting out in a timely manner, since that money typically goes toward well-established nonprofit organizations with experience doing refugee resettlement work.

Peterson of the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance said she is confident her office can distribute new money for refugee assistance without delays.

Peterson said her agency will soon hire three more staff members to help manage the Immigrant Relief Fund, using the 10% portion of the fund that lawmakers said could go toward administering the program.

Barón, the executive director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, said Washington state is doing more than most states to help undocumented immigrants who have struggled during the pandemic.

Still, he thinks the delay in distributing the Immigrant Relief Fund money shows there is room for improvement.

Going forward, Barón and other advocates would like to see Washington state establish a standing unemployment fund for undocumented immigrants, so those workers aren't as dependent on one-time aid like the Immigrant Relief Fund, he said.

	<p>“I think a lot of people in other states would be jealous of the fact there was this large investment by state legislators in this community,” Barón said of last year’s \$340 million allocation for undocumented workers. “But I always think that precisely because we are a welcoming, progressive state, we should always be pushing the bar even higher.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Chechens to Ukraine; fight against Putin
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dqjn8/chechnya-fighters-ukraine-russia-ramzan-kadyrov
GIST	<p>When Kyiv announced it disrupted a plot by Chechen warlord Ramzan Kadyrov to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, young Chechen men already preparing to head to fight for Ukraine took it as confirmation they’d have another chance to fight Vladimir Putin’s Russia and his key henchman at the same time.</p> <p>With a population of 2 million under Kadyrov’s semi-autonomous rule, Chechnya’s two vicious civil wars in the 1990s and increasingly brutal rule by Kadyrov have combined to create a Chechen diaspora community across Europe and Turkey in the hundreds of thousands. Hundreds of them now appear ready to join the fight to defend Ukraine.</p> <p>“Kadyrovtsy are in Ukraine fighting alongside the Russians, that makes it every Chechen man’s responsibility to confront the enemies of Chechnya and our faith,” according to Ramzan, a former jihadist fighter in Syria from Chechnya quietly living in exile in Turkey, speaking under a pseudonym. “Kadyrov and his clan control the [Russian-loyal security services] and hunt his political opponents in Russia, in Chechnya, and in Europe.”</p> <p>“But now they are in Ukraine for Putin and we can hunt them again,” he said. “We know these men [sent to kill Zelenskyy] who work for Putin’s dog [Kadyrov].”</p> <p>Ukraine has requested foreign volunteers, particularly those with specific military skills. It has already received more applications than it can immediately vet for links to criminal or terrorist organisations, according to a Ukrainian Defence Ministry official interviewed by VICE World News.</p> <p>The Ukrainian military is nearly encircled on multiple fronts, including the capital Kyiv. The ad-hoc resistance of local militias and the Ukrainian army faces material and manpower shortages that will only increase as more Russian forces are committed to the battlefield.</p> <p>But while volunteers without formal military training tend to be useless in times of war, Chechen volunteers had a significant military impact at times on the Syrian civil war and ensuing war with ISIS.</p> <p>Led by Abu Omar al Shishani, a half-Chechen, ex-Georgian special forces soldier who eventually became the overall military commander for ISIS before dying in a 2016 drone strike, the Chechens and other Russian-speaking Muslims immediately gained a reputation for battlefield competence in a fight they initially joined because of Syria’s alliance with Russia. And now a younger generation thinks Ukraine offers that same opportunity to get back at Putin and Kadyrov, who is personally hated by much of the diaspora, many who fled his persecution.</p> <p>“More requests than we can process and there are concerns of course about the background of some of the people who want to come fight,” said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.</p> <p>“Nazis and jihadists are strictly prohibited, we understand it’s a disaster for our image if the wrong people come.”</p> <p>“Volunteers are a nice gesture and that people want to risk their lives for Ukraine is very appreciated, but unless you have a handful of very specific military skills, it’s not a real solution to the Russian war machine. Ukraine needs support from states, not people; we have lots of brave people.”</p>

But inside Idlib, Syria along the border with Turkey is a rebel enclave with dozens of deeply experienced fighters from former Soviet states. Their experience includes giving military training during the Syrian civil war. Many appear willing to leave, but the past associations with jihadists have everyone wary of letting them across the border to transit Turkey for Ukraine.

“There’s a lot of [Russian-speaking] guys inside Idlib who would rather be in Ukraine than Syria, but they are not sure if the Turks will let them pass the border on their way,” said Abu Marwan, a Syrian who once fought alongside a mostly Chechen unit that eventually joined ISIS.

“But they are unsure if they will be arrested. Most of the guys who are left did not join ISIS, but they did come to fight jihad and have associations. They’re asking the Turks for permission to move.”

A regional security official confirmed that Turkey’s intelligence service was aware that some of the Russian-speaking Idlib groups, specifically fighters [associated](#) with Malhama Tactical - a small, Russian-speaking group of [military trainers](#) - had expressed an interest in departing for Ukraine, but it had not yet been decided.

“It’s a complex subject with many different security and political factors,” said the regional official, who refused to be identified to speak freely about intelligence matters. “There’s a lot of guys that would be fine to let leave, they’re dangerous if you’re Russian or a Kadyrov fighter, but they’re Chechens focused on Chechen issues not international jihadist dogma. But there are also a handful anyone would want to arrest [while] in transit.”

That’s not deterring the young men of the Chechen diaspora set on fighting against Russia and Kadyrov, who represents a former rebel faction that eventually betrayed its comrades by forging an alliance with Moscow.

“Tens of thousands of young men in French and German cities, throughout Turkey,” said Ramzan, describing the pool of potential applicants.

“It’s a cultural pressure for us Chechens - my father and uncles fought in the 1994 Chechen War, I fought in the 1999 war, went into exile and fought the Russians in Syria (2014),” he said. “Young men know the reason they live in Lyon [France] and not Grozny is because of Putin and his dog. They want to help Ukraine, but they want revenge.”

“Shamil,” a 22-year-old Chechen MMA fighter living in a city in [southern](#) France under an asylum visa, told VICE World News that the first announcement that Kadyrov had sent his fighters to help Putin attack Ukraine meant his community had to respond.

“I am going to Ukraine this weekend, inshallah,” he said, explaining his planned route with the agreement that it not be published. “Each night, all Chechen people pray for the chance to defeat Russia. My MMA gym will be empty next week if the French police do not interfere.”

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HEADLINE	03/02 Zelensky defends Ukraine, unites the world
SOURCE	https://time.com/6154139/volodymyr-zelensky-ukraine-profile-russia/
GIST	<p>The President wanted to get to the trenches. He’d already walked for half an hour in his helmet through the mud, surrounded by generals and guards, and he insisted they continue. On the far side of some sagging power lines, the group could see the start of the Russian positions, well within reach of the snipers who had killed three Ukrainian soldiers two weeks before. But Volodymyr Zelensky refused to stop.</p> <p>“Our guys are over there, right?” the commander in chief asked one of his generals, who was advising the group to turn back. “They’ll hear I came all this way and didn’t come to see them. They’ll be upset.” Then Zelensky tossed a glance in my direction, spun around, and continued hiking through the brush.</p>

The gesture made me wonder: Was this an act? We'd [met for interviews](#) before, the first time backstage at Zelensky's comedy show in the spring of 2019, during [his moonshot campaign for Ukraine's presidency](#). We met again that [winter in Kyiv's presidential headquarters](#), which he described at the time, only half joking, as a gilded fortress he wanted to escape. But this trip to the front lines last April was the first time I'd seen him with his troops—the former actor playing the part of the generalissimo. It was not entirely convincing.

The danger, though, was very real. By the time Zelensky came to power, [Ukraine had been at war with Russia](#) for more than five years. The death toll had topped 13,000, with almost nightly shooting or shelling across the front lines, a jagged tear between the once fraternal nations. No one knew at the time that the war would soon become incalculably worse. But during our trip to the front, Zelensky was aware the Russian troops were already massing by the tens of thousands on the other side of the border.

"They want us to be afraid," he told me at the end of the trip, as we flew back to Kyiv on the presidential plane. "They want the West to be frightened of the strength and power of Russia. There's no big secret here." Zelensky understood that showing his fear would play into Russia's hands, though he admitted that the threat of an invasion scared him. "What's frightening is that their intentions may not end" with a show of force at the border, he told me. "There could be a broader military plan."

About 10 months later, in the early morning hours of Feb. 24, [Russia put that plan into effect](#). Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to "de-Nazify" Ukraine, his chosen term for ousting the first Jewish President in its history and installing a regime loyal to Russia in his place. The invasion thrust Zelensky into a different role, one that at first seemed ill-suited to his character. His friends and advisers have often told me that Zelensky has thin skin. He suffers from the actor's malady: an abiding need to be liked and applauded. "We try not to let him look at Facebook," one adviser told me, because critical comments from strangers were liable to depress him.

But as the Russian bombs began to fall on Ukrainian cities and troops moved to surround the capital, the President underwent a transformation. Before our eyes he came to embody a struggle that most Western statesmen had long forgotten how to fight, the one that is sometimes required to keep tyranny from killing off democracy. Zelensky not only rallied his own people to defend their nation, inspiring them to toss petrol bombs at Russian military vehicles and stand in the way of tanks. He also galvanized the [world's democracies](#) in ways that seemed unthinkable just a week before.

The change was not instantaneous. Western leaders were still divided two days after the invasion, when they met to agree on a package of sanctions to punish Russia for its attack. Germany, Hungary, and Italy initially wanted to water down these measures. Then Zelensky dialed in to their meeting. Calm but determined, his pale face covered in stubble, he told the leaders of the free world that this might be the last time they would see him alive. "The enemy has marked me as target No. 1," he said in a video statement shortly after the call. "My family is target No. 2."

Yet Zelensky decided to stay in his capital, an act of courage that has already altered the course of history. It roused the U.S. and its allies to impose [unprecedented penalties against Russia](#), crashing the ruble and unplugging much of its economy from the rest of the world. Germany decided to pour more than \$100 billion into its military, casting aside a postwar tradition of pacifism that has long frustrated allies. Switzerland broke from its tradition of neutrality to support sanctions. The E.U. agreed to put Ukraine on a path to membership, shedding decades of internal resistance.

On the sixth day of the invasion, Zelensky delivered a speech via video link to the European Parliament. "Do prove that you are with us," he implored through an interpreter, who seemed to choke back tears while translating the President's words. "Do prove that you will not let us go. Do prove that you indeed are Europeans, and then life will win over death, and light will win over darkness." As one observer noted, it was as if Charlie Chaplin had morphed into Winston Churchill.

Zelensky now spends his days underground, in bunkers and basements, emerging every now and then to raise the nation's spirits, often on social media. In one video message, he shares a meal with a few of his troops: bread with salami, sprats, and instant coffee. The people who surround him are mostly old friends, the ones who followed him through the world of show business, into the presidency, and now to war. "No one is here by accident," his chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, wrote to me from the bunker on the seventh day of the invasion.

Born in 1978, the future President grew up in a working-class Jewish family in the city of Kryvyi Rih ("Crooked Horn"), in the shadow of Ukraine's biggest steel mill. Like many in that part of the country, his parents spoke Russian at home. Like nearly all Jews in Ukraine, the family had suffered tremendously during World War II. Zelensky's grandfather, who commanded an artillery platoon in the Red Army, lost his father and three of his brothers in the Holocaust.

After the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, Zelensky's hometown became what he called a "city of bandits," its economy in steep decline. To stay off the streets, he joined a sketch-comedy troupe at 17, performing with his friends around Ukraine and later in Russia. The troupe went on to form a production company called Kvartal 95 (District 95), after the neighborhood where they grew up. "It was a rough place, the kind that makes you desperate to escape," says Vadim Pereverzev, Zelensky's old friend and business partner. "That was our main motivation."

The offices of Kvartal 95 now occupy the top three floors of a high-rise near the center of Kyiv, with panoramic views over the city. Its walls are covered in posters for the movies they produced, mostly romantic comedies with the future President in the starring roles. Zelensky also lent his raspy voice to the animated bear in the Ukrainian version of *Paddington*. He worked on the Ukrainian version of *Dancing With the Stars*, both as a contestant (he won) and a producer.

His biggest hit was a sitcom called *Servant of the People*, which first aired in 2015. The show was based on a wacky premise: a high school history teacher, played by Zelensky, uncorks an epic rant against corruption, which one of his students films and posts on YouTube. The clip goes viral on the eve of an election, prompting voters to install the teacher as the nation's President in a rebuke to the amoral elites.

The show was a sensation in both Russia and Ukraine, and in 2019 it became Zelensky's springboard into politics. In a video posted on YouTube that New Year's Eve, he stood next to a Christmas tree and announced his intention to run for Ukraine's highest office. Voters flocked to his campaign, which was hardly traditional: Zelensky did not take part in debates or publish an electoral platform. Instead he continued touring with his comedy show, a mix of vaudeville and political satire that was not always in the best of taste. (One sketch had Zelensky pretend to play a Jewish folk song on the piano with his penis.) When the act premiered in Kyiv during the presidential race, the city's biggest concert hall was filled to capacity, despite ticket prices that ran about as high as the average Ukrainian monthly pension. Members of the troupe partied backstage, wondering what Cabinet positions they might get if Zelensky won. "I think I'd make a pretty good Defense Minister," said one comedian, Alexander Pikalov, after pouring me a shot of whiskey in a plastic cup.

In his dressing room after the show, Zelensky had little interest in discussing politics or foreign affairs. The closest he came was this promise: "We'll figure it out." His production company had just wrapped the third season of *Servant of the People*, in which Zelensky's character saves Ukraine from ruin. It appeared on Netflix a few days before the election, giving voters enough time to binge the season before heading to the polls. "There's no way the others can compete with that," Zelensky told me with a smile in his dressing room.

He was right. Nearly three-quarters of the electorate cast their ballots for him in the final round of voting. His campaign swept virtually every region of the country, including those that tend to lean toward Russia. That May, Zelensky's new political party, which he had named after his sitcom, took a majority in parliament, becoming the first in Ukraine's history to control both the legislature and the executive branch.

Zelensky's first priority as President was to bring peace with Russia. But he faced an obstacle in Ukraine's most important ally. Two months into his tenure, the U.S. froze aid to Ukraine worth nearly \$400 million, most of it meant to shore up the nation's military. U.S. President Donald Trump wanted the Ukrainians to legitimize his claims of corruption against Joe Biden, and he was using the military aid as leverage. In a phone call in July 2019, Trump asked Zelensky to "do us a favor" by announcing investigations into those bogus claims.

The blackmail attempt, which led to [Trump's first impeachment](#) in the House of Representatives, dented Zelensky's faith in Ukraine's foreign partners. "I don't trust anyone at all," he said when we met in his office that December. A few days later, he was due to meet Putin for their first round of peace negotiations. His expectations were low, but he was intent on doing whatever it took to avoid a broader war. The eastern regions Russia occupied in 2014, he said, were not worth the lives of Ukrainian soldiers. "I cannot send them there," he told me. "How? How many of them will die? Hundreds of thousands, and then an all-out war will start, an all-out war in Ukraine, and then across Europe."

The talks with Putin went nowhere. Russia refused to cede control of the breakaway regions in east Ukraine, and the government in Kyiv refused to grant those regions the autonomy Moscow demanded. Soon the [COVID-19 pandemic was raging](#), and Zelensky could not secure vaccine supplies from his allies in the West. Nor would he accept an offer from Putin to provide Ukraine with Russian-made vaccines, which Kyiv saw as a weapon in Moscow's information war. Many voters felt differently. By the end of 2020, public support for Zelensky dropped as low as 20% in some surveys, down from over 70% a year earlier.

The Ukrainian government then turned its focus to political skirmishes, going after pro-Russian politicians and other domestic opponents. The first big target of the crackdown was Putin's close friend Viktor Medvedchuk, who chairs the biggest opposition party in the Ukrainian parliament. The state seized the assets of Medvedchuk's family and later placed him under house arrest. Even some of Zelensky's closest allies were dismayed at the decision. "It certainly raises questions about the rule of law," Dmytro Razumkov, who had led Zelensky's presidential campaign, told me in October, hours before he was ousted as speaker of the parliament.

Putin was furious over the crackdown against his friend Medvedchuk, calling it an "obvious purge of the political field." He responded by sending thousands of Russian troops to the border for a series of "large-scale exercises" that went on for most of 2021. Shelling and sniper fire increased along the front lines. The U.S. began to warn of a rapid escalation, even an invasion.

Through it all, Zelensky tried to project a sense of calm. On our visit to the front lines in early April, he spent nearly an hour talking to the troops inside a system of trenches they had nicknamed Vietnam—a nod to the mud and morass of a war they had seen in the movies. General Ruslan Khomchak, then the top commander of Ukraine's armed forces, took the President to the spot where three of his soldiers had been killed in an ambush two weeks earlier. "There was no tactical reason to attack that post," Khomchak said. "They just shot those boys in cold blood."

To my surprise, Zelensky did not promise to avenge them. Instead he questioned the wisdom of sacrificing soldiers in defense of these muddy dugouts. Ukraine had seized that bit of ground in a violent push in 2018, the year before Zelensky was elected. "For some, that meant we were the tough guys," he told me before we headed back toward the armored cars. "For others it meant their sons would not be coming home." The President had no intention of making such trades again. The lives of his soldiers, he said, were more valuable to him than any scraps of contested terrain.

His foil in the Kremlin clearly disagreed. By early winter, the number of Russian troops on Ukraine's borders topped 70,000. Around Halloween, the warnings from the U.S. government began to grow more dire. At meetings in Kyiv and Washington, U.S. intelligence officials and diplomats tried to convince Zelensky's team that a Russian invasion was imminent. "They put the chances at 80%," says

one foreign policy adviser to Zelensky, who received these briefings last fall. The Americans backed up their estimates, the adviser says, with satellite imagery of Russian hardware arrayed at the border, as well as intercepted communications that suggested Russia was preparing to invade.

But Zelensky and his inner circle did not believe an invasion was at hand. Ukrainian border guards told him the chances of a full-scale attack were not much higher than they had been since the war started in 2014. “We’re talking about a black-swan event,” says Iuliia Mendel, a communications adviser to Zelensky. “Nobody could believe it was going to happen.”

In the early morning of Feb. 24, both Putin and Zelensky appeared on TV in their respective countries to deliver their final speeches before the invasion commenced. The contrast between them could not have been starker. Putin’s address dripped with menace, and his claims against Ukraine were detached from reality. He said he had ordered a “special military operation” aimed at the “demilitarization and de-Nazification” of the entire country. It was a pledge, in effect, to oust the government of a sovereign nation and destroy the armed forces of Russia’s largest neighbor to the west. Putin also issued a chilling threat to any “outside forces” that might come to Ukraine’s defense: “It will lead to consequences of the sort that you have not faced ever in your history.”

In his own address, Zelensky chose to speak directly to the Russian people. He told them he had tried to reach Putin that day in a final effort to avert the invasion, but the Kremlin had ignored him. Then he tried to counteract the propaganda coming from Russian state TV. “You are told that these flames will bring freedom to Ukraine. But the people of Ukraine are already free,” he said. “In attacking us, you will see our faces, not our backs.”

The Russian assault began that morning with a barrage of rockets lobbed at cities across Ukraine. Troops poured over the border from multiple directions, making a push toward Kyiv from the north in an attempt to overrun the capital. Zelensky holed up in the presidential headquarters with his team of close advisers. His chief of staff, Yermak, remembers that as a moment of clarity. “When you realize that, despite all your efforts, the scariest thing of all has happened, then everything becomes extremely sharp and clear,” he wrote to me. “We are here, they are there. They attacked us. We are defending. Truth is on our side.”

It gave Ukraine a clear advantage in the information war, where Zelensky’s stagecraft turned into a powerful weapon. As Russia [spread lies](#) about neo-Nazis using children in Ukraine as human shields, Zelensky countered with a barrage of posts on social media, letting his people hear the earnest, grainy voice they had come to know from his movies. He seemed to be near them, and he was: Zelensky had refused an offer from the U.S. to evacuate him to safer ground. “I need ammunition,” he told the Americans. “Not a ride.”

The President did not even retreat from the government quarter in Kyiv’s center. Nor did he wear a bulletproof vest. Photos and videos showed him in a T-shirt as he led his besieged nation from some of the same familiar rooms, with their indigo carpets and heavy chandeliers, where I had met him and his staff at the start of his tenure. Only now the floors were heaped with sandbags and soldiers stood around, forming a weak defense against the Russian bombs that fell nearby.

[Images of devastation](#) reached Zelensky’s team from across the country: dozens of fatalities, including children, as artillery pounded residential neighborhoods; a missile striking the TV tower in Kyiv; another one landing on the central square of Kharkiv in the east. Yet for every report of a Russian barrage, there was news of Ukrainians standing their ground, destroying columns of armored Russian vehicles, capturing tanks and prisoners of war. It soon became clear to military experts that Putin had misjudged both the will and the ability of Ukrainians to resist. U.S. intelligence assesses that morale is sagging among the Russian soldiers on the ground, according to a senior U.S. defense official.

On the fourth day of the invasion, Zelensky sent a few of his comrades to an initial round of peace talks with Putin’s men. They agreed only to continue talking, even though the Kremlin showed no sign of dropping its demands. As aid poured into Ukraine from the West—including shoulder-fired rockets

	<p>that could take out Russian tanks and aircraft—Putin ordered his generals to put Russia’s nuclear forces on high alert.</p> <p>On the last day of February, Zelensky appeared before a camera in the government compound to sign a formal application to join the E.U. “Our goal is to be together with all Europeans and, most importantly, to be on an equal footing,” he said. “I’m sure it’s fair. I’m sure it’s possible.” All of a sudden, after nearly two decades of frustrating talks with E.U. leaders, Ukraine appeared to be within reach of joining the bloc. The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, told reporters the same day that Ukraine is “one of us and we want them in the European Union.”</p> <p>Toward the end of the first week of all-out war, a 40-mile column of Russian military hardware began to form a noose around Kyiv. Yet Zelensky’s advisers assured me that spirits remained high. “We all get what’s at stake,” Yermak, his chief of staff, wrote me. “Our freedom. The very existence of our state. So we’re working flat out, beyond the limits of our strength.” Apart from commanding his military forces, the President’s days were packed with phone calls of support from around the world: the Prime Ministers of Japan, Norway, Israel, and India; the Presidents of Poland, France, and the U.S.; the King and Queen of the Netherlands; the Orthodox Patriarch in Istanbul; even the Pope.</p> <p>With every new promise of aid and prayer for safekeeping, Ukraine and its leader seemed to transcend their roles as victims of aggression. They became examples of the kind of fortitude that all of us hope we can muster when called. There is no faking that kind of courage, and no way to tell whether we have it until the time we need it most. For Zelensky, that moment may have come on Feb. 25, the second night of the invasion. He walked outside his office into the winter air, surrounded by his closest aides, and filmed a simple message on his phone: “We are all here.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 How West supplies, arms get to Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220302-how-are-western-arms-supplies-for-ukraine-getting-there
GIST	<p>The EU has earmarked €450 million (\$503 million) for lethal arms, which include air-defense systems, anti-tank weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment for Ukraine’s armed forces. A further €50 million will be spent on providing non-lethal supplies such as fuel, protective gear, helmets, and first-aid kits.</p> <p>As EU treaties do not allow it to tap into its normal budget for military purposes, the bloc is activating a vehicle called the European Peace Facility, which allows it to provide military aid up to a ceiling of €5 billion.</p> <p>It comes after a paradigm shift in Germany’s defense policy, which saw it sign off on providing lethal weapons to Ukraine, including 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 “Stinger” class surface-to-air missiles, thereby reversing its ban on supplying lethal weapons to a war zone.</p> <p>The US is also stepping up its shipments and providing an additional \$350 million (€313 million) in military assistance, including Javelin antitank missiles, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, small arms and ammunition.</p> <p>That brings the total of US military aid to Ukraine to \$1 billion over the past year and to more than \$2.5 billion since 2014.</p> <p>The logistical challenges</p> <p>While this signals a huge boost for Ukraine in its effort to repel Russian forces, there are concerns about the logistics involved and the potential obstacles. Questions surround the timing and the routes.</p> <p>So far, military aid from the West has been delivered by land or air, depending on the type of weapon.</p>

But the airspace over Ukraine is now controlled by Russian fighter jets that could intercept the shipments “predominantly by airstrikes and missile strikes. If they know the routes they can take them under surveillance and look for the specific means of transportation,” Gustav Gressel, an expert on Eastern Europe and defense policy with the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank, told DW via email.

The prospect of such a disruption puts the spotlight on Poland, which shares a 535-kilometer (332-mile) long border with Ukraine. The US Army, in particular, has a long history of [dispatching forces and equipment through Poland](#).

And the onus on Poland is increasing following Hungary’s refusal to allow lethal arms to transit its territory.

Poland’s role

“All of this equipment is basically massing on the Polish border at the moment. Even if Slovakia, for example, wanted to, it’s not an easy route because of the geography of the mountain ranges that move from Slovakia down through Romania. So there are two routes: One is close to the Belarusian border, then there’s one slightly south,” Ed Arnold, a research fellow for European Security at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based think tank, told DW.

Marc Finaud, head of Arms Proliferation at the Geneva Center for Security Policy, notes that the [dynamics on the ground](#) could shift very quickly. “If these convoys or transports would be stopped — if Western countries are under attack, whether they are within NATO or already across the border into Ukraine — that could increase the tensions and the escalation,” he told DW.

Arnold says the danger of such an escalation is currently holding back the Russians because “you would be targeting Western resupply.”

Still, he says he’s surprised that they haven’t cut it off “because actually that would be useful for their strategy if they could take those two routes. The Russians have the option of moving from the south-west of Belarus and interdicting all of this equipment that’s coming in.”

Time is of the essence

The other crucial factor is time, which is [running out fast](#) for reinforcements to get to Ukrainian forces in Kyiv and Kharkiv.

This, says Arnold, is particularly problematic for “the Ukrainian forces on the eastern line of contact who are potentially going to be cut off if they don’t move to the west of the Dnieper River soon. They will need to resupply because they’re doing the heaviest fighting and they are the best Ukrainian troops from the 95th Air Assault Brigade.”

So is there any other way to get the western arms systems to the front lines in Ukraine? “The other possibility is that Ukrainian or foreign fighters could pick things up in Poland and then move over the border, but that’s not in great numbers,” said Arnold.

At this stage the danger of ammunition supplies drying up is critical, says Arnold. “There’s maybe five days left of ammo for the heavier systems the Ukrainians have. The other option they have is to capture Russian abandoned weapons, which will sustain them for a little while, but not a huge amount of time.”

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HEADLINE	03/02 Ukraine, Russia to hold talks again
SOURCE	https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2022-03-02/ukrainian-russian-officials-to-talk-again-amid-attacks-by-russia
GIST	Ukrainian and Russian officials are set to hold talks on Wednesday for the second time since Russia invaded the former Soviet state, but violence is showing few signs of stopping.

News of the planned meeting was [reported by Reuters](#), which cited information published by Tass, Russia's state media agency. Tass [noted](#) comments from an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and said the talks will take place in Belarus.

Officials from the two countries also met on the Belarus border on Monday, but those talks seemed to yield no progress. Zelenskyy said earlier this week that further meetings and a possible cease-fire would require Russian forces to "at least stop bombing people," [according to Reuters](#).

But the bombing hasn't stopped yet. Russia's ground advance into Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, has been halted. But more missile strikes hit the city on Wednesday, [The Kyiv Independent reports](#). This comes after Russian attacks had [already intensified](#) with a new push against civilian areas and government buildings thought to be aimed at demoralizing the Ukrainian resistance.

The Associated Press reported that Russian defense officials on Wednesday denied reports that their forces include conscripts, which U.S. officials confirmed in a Tuesday briefing that touched on low morale among the invading forces. A Defense Ministry spokesman said 498 Russian troops [have been killed so far](#) in the conflict and another 1,600 had been wounded. Some Western projections estimate the number to be far higher.

Also on Wednesday, the U.N. General Assembly voted overwhelmingly 141-5 to demand that Russia stop the invasion and withdraw its troops from Ukraine.

Belarus – the reported location of talks between Russia and Ukraine – has remained under scrutiny amid reports that Belarusian forces are [assisting](#) Russia in Ukraine, and international officials are taking note. The European Union announced on Wednesday sanctions against Belarus for its supporting role in the invasion of Ukraine, [Reuters reported](#).

Officials keep announcing new economic actions against Russia as well. President Joe Biden said in his [State of the Union address](#) Tuesday night that he would ban Russian aircraft from U.S. airspace and appoint a task force to investigate crimes of Russian oligarchs, warning that America is coming for the elites' "ill-begotten gains."

Biden told reporters while departing the White House on Wednesday that "nothing is off the table" when it comes to additional sanctions against Russia, such as banning oil imports. He said "it's clear" the Russians are deliberately targeting civilian areas in Ukraine, according to a pool report, but added that it is "early to say that" Russia has committed war crimes.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Australia floods: 500,000 face evacuation
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/mar/03/nsw-floods-almost-500000-people-across-greater-sydney-under-evacuation-orders
GIST	<p>Sydney and the Illawarra region of New South Wales have avoided the worst effects of the devastating east coast low that instead eased and shifted west over Newcastle and the Hunter region.</p> <p>Newcastle remains under a severe weather warning with falls of 60 to 100mm possible over six hours and the associated risk of flash flooding.</p> <p>Major flooding also remained possible at Windsor on the Hawkesbury-Nepean River, thanks to heavy rains in the surrounding catchment areas. The major flooding at North Richmond may be close to its peak, the bureau said in its most recent update on Thursday afternoon.</p> <p>Authorities had to prepare for the worst as Warragamba Dam west of Sydney started spilling on Wednesday, but rainfalls were less than expected.</p>

The gauge at the dam itself collected 237mm in the 48 hours to 9am Thursday, but just 5mm up to Thursday 3pm, Ben Domensino, a senior meteorologist at Weatherzone, said.

The east coast low developed into three separate areas of circulation just off the coast.

“That means it’s not a strong and well-defined low pressure system, and this is weakening near the coast,” Domensino said.

The Hunter will see ongoing rain, but for Sydney and the Central Coast there should only be showers. Showers near Sydney “won’t be doing too much to raise river levels”, he said.

However, there was another upper-level low pressure system crossing south-eastern Australia this weekend.

“Some models are suggesting that will cause heavier rain to redevelop from Sunday over eastern NSW and into Monday, with the potential for another low pressure system forming near the coast early next week on Monday or Tuesday.”

Earlier on Thursday, about half a million people across NSW were under evacuation orders or warnings as the wild weather that battered parts of eastern Australia for a week bore down on the greater Sydney region.

Steph Cooke, NSW’s emergency services minister, said the state had 76 evacuation orders in place on Thursday morning affecting 200,000 people, with a further 18 evacuation warnings covering about 300,000 residents.

“We have 500,000 people in our state right now who are either the subject of an evacuation warning or an evacuation,” Cooke said.

The evacuation orders covered areas of northern NSW and parts of the greater Sydney region and the Illawarra.

The Bureau of Meteorology issued multiple warnings for rivers to flood and for severe weather to affect a region of eastern NSW from near Taree, north of Newcastle, down almost to Moruya Heads on the south coast.

Flood warnings were in place for the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers near Sydney, prompting many of the evacuations overnight, but also for the Wilsons, Richmond and Clarence rivers in northern NSW, where there have been record floods.

Warragamba Dam west of Sydney was spilling at a rate of 225 gegalitres a day with a predicted peak rate of 300-350GL a day – half the worst-case scenario.

That meant thousands of households and businesses could avoid damaging flooding from the Hawkesbury and Nepean rivers north-west of Sydney.

The BoM noted major flooding continued along the Hawkesbury and Lower Nepean rivers, however.

“River levels are continuing to rise at Windsor where major flooding may develop Thursday evening,” the bureau said. “Further heavy rainfall is forecast today and into Friday which may result in extended and possibly higher major flood peaks. River levels at North Richmond are expected to remain below those observed during the March 2021 event.”

The NSW State Emergency Services had received a total of 11,747 requests for help since the start of the floods crisis, with 1,462 calls coming since 3.30pm on Wednesday.

The Insurance Council of Australia said insurers have received 60,163 claims related to the ongoing flooding in south-east Queensland and NSW.

About 83% of total claims relate to property with the remainder for motor vehicles, the ICA said. “Based on previous flood events the current cost of claims is estimated to be about \$900m,” the council said on Thursday.

The heavy rain and potentially damaging winds and dangerous surf were the result of an east coast low that was located about 100km east of Newcastle at 6am on Thursday.

Sydney’s forecast had been revised lower to between 50mm and 90mm of rain from an earlier prediction of 100mm to 150mm on Thursday, as the low looks likely to cross the coast farther north. There remained the chance of a possibly severe thunderstorm.

Where thunderstorms form, there is the risk of locally intense rainfall, reaching as much as 200mm over six hours, leading to dangerous and life-threatening flash flooding, according to the bureau.

Many schools were closed across NSW and the SES was encouraging people in affected areas to avoid all non-essential travel.

Rainfall in the 24 hours from 9am Wednesday topped 100mm in areas of Sydney’s south, west and north-west, while the central business district collected about 50mm.

The NSW deputy premier, Paul Toole, said on Wednesday the worst-case scenario was for Warragamba Dam to spill at 600GL a day. That would have been well above the 440GL to 460GL a day peak rate during the March 2021 floods.

The forecast offers little solace for many along the eastern seaboard, with more rain predicted for the coming week.

Domensino said the slow-moving system had continually exceeded forecasts for rainfall.

“This heavy rain has all been fed by an atmospheric river that’s just been dragging moisture across the Coral Sea and the Tasman Sea and directing it towards the east coast,” Domensino said. Similar big flooding events around the world have followed such patterns.

“There is a climate change signal in atmospheric rivers, and that’s been one of the components of this event.”

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HEADLINE	03/02 Rising gas prices deal blow to homeless
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/02/us-gas-prices-homeless-people-living-in-vehicles
GIST	<p>For the past five months Anna Hokuf has lived in her car with her cat after she left an abusive home environment.</p> <p>Trying to save enough money to secure an apartment doing odd jobs while homeless has been hard enough for the 19-year-old. Now rising gas prices have made it all but impossible.</p> <p>“I don’t have the ability to save much money and gas prices being as high as they are at almost \$4 a gallon really makes being homeless tough,” said Hokuf, of the Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, area. “I have to keep my car on all the time to stay warm and to keep my cat warm, which wastes more gas and has caused a strain on my car.”</p> <p>It takes about \$60 to fill up Hokuf’s car’s tank and about \$40 a day for gas to keep warm at night. Her food options are limited as she doesn’t have any way to heat food. She showers and does laundry</p>

intermittently whenever she can scrounge enough money for a hotel room for a night or two. “Unfortunately all the money I’m able to receive generally goes to gas or food for my cat,” she said.

Gas prices have soared over the past year and are [expected](#) to continue climbing as the Russian invasion of Ukraine further disrupts oil production, production that was already suffering from the impact of Covid-19. Last week the price of oil hit its highest in more than seven years and the war [threatens to stoke the US’s](#) already troubling inflation issues.

The Biden administration has [pledged](#) to take action to curb rising gas prices with the announcement of economic sanctions on Russia, which is the second largest oil producer and exporter in the world. So far the sanctions [have not included](#) Russia’s oil and gas industry, as Europe is heavily dependent on it and doing so would cause oil prices to spike even further.

[According to the American Automobile Association](#), the average gallon of gas in the US is \$3.619 as of 1 March, compared with \$2.72 a gallon one year ago. States with the highest average gas prices include California at \$4.837 a gallon and Hawaii at \$4.565 a gallon, with Arkansas the lowest at \$3.243 a gallon.

Oil companies have reaped enormous profits from rising gas prices over the past year, with the largest 24 oil companies [reporting](#) \$174bn in profits in the first nine months of 2021, as companies have rejected requests to increase oil production to mitigate price increases.

In the meantime the rising gas prices are disproportionately hurting low-income Americans, especially a [growing segment](#) of the US homeless population that lives out of their vehicles.

In Michigan, a young woman living out of her car who requested to remain anonymous makes money by delivering food and groceries through gig apps, spending anywhere from \$10 to \$15 a day to \$100 a day on gas. They have lived in their car since the end of December after losing their job in September and couldn’t afford to stay in their apartment. They rely on a Planet Fitness gym membership to shower regularly

“Having to idle for heat when I’m in colder areas definitely takes a toll on my gas mileage,” they said. “I don’t have the greatest credit, so buying a home is out of range for me currently, and with rent skyrocketing and most requiring income to be two to three times the rent it’s impossible to find anything affordable.”

Louie Vashiomiattii of Auburn, Washington, moved into his van about two months ago when his landlord of three years opted to sell the house where he was renting a basement apartment, and he couldn’t afford to move into a new apartment in the area as rents have [soared](#) over the past year.

“It’s the most stressful thing I deal with every day,” said Vashiomiattii. “I didn’t realize how much gas would cost when I moved into my van.”

He spends about \$40 a day on gas, with much of it used to keep warm through the winter. He currently works a job in retail and is struggling to save money with high gas prices, as the apartments in his area require first and last month’s rent in addition to a security deposit.

Rising gas prices are also significantly hurting rideshare drivers, who already operate on thin profit margins.

Ben Valdez, a part-time Uber driver in Los Angeles, California, for six years, has reduced his work hours to only when surge pricing is available as gas prices in the area have hit about \$5 a gallon.

“As gas prices went up, and as demand went down, I just started seeing less and less reason to drive,” said Valdez, who spends anywhere from \$35 a night when he drives to \$75 to fill his gas tank. “A lot of drivers are starting to feel the pinch. It’s really, really expensive to put gas in.”

HEADLINE	03/02 Seattle libraries new chief librarian
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3375803/seattle-libraries-select-new-chief-librarian/
GIST	<p>The Seattle Public Library's board of trustees unanimously appointed Tom Fay the chief librarian of the library system on Wednesday afternoon.</p> <p>"I am honored and humbled to be selected as Seattle's next Chief Librarian," wrote Fay in a news release, upon accepting the position. "The Seattle Public Library is a beacon of learning, connection, opportunity and inspiration for our city. Its foundation of strength and excellence is due to the commitment of our public and our staff. I look forward to learning from the many communities we serve to help shape the future of the Library."</p> <p>Tom Fay is the current interim chief librarian. His appointment follows the 2021 departure of Marcellus Turner, who formerly held the position for 10 years.</p> <p>Fay joined the SPL in 2015 as the director of programs and was appointed by the board to serve as interim chief last year.</p> <p>The selection process for chief librarian was narrowed down to two candidates in January. The other, Chad Helton, served as the library director of Hennepin County, Minnesota.</p> <p>Seattle chief librarian race takes a surprise twist with remote work dispute</p> <p>Hennepin County announced that Helton had resigned from the position in February, following a settlement agreement that he reached with the county. Minnesota's Star Tribune reports that the settlement was for a \$60,000 sum for "emotional damages" suffered by Helton.</p> <p>That information was not disclosed to the board of trustees during a lengthy interview process with the board on Feb. 10.</p> <p>In that interview, Helton addressed Hennepin County's residency policy which now explicitly states that county supervisors must live in Minnesota where they work, following Helton's decision to serve as library director from his home in Los Angeles.</p> <p>"I applied for the ability to work out of state on a permanent basis, and that was approved," Helton told the board Feb. 10. "And I moved back to California. ... Staff wasn't really aware. And that was not communicated greatly. But I've never really been in a position where I had to tell people where I live. So I didn't think it was something that was necessary."</p> <p>With Fay's appointment, he will steward the libraries' 650 employees. The chief librarian also holds a cabinet position with the mayor's office.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Russia war widens, West options shrink
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-russian-invasion-in-ukraine-widens-the-wests-options-shrink-11646243596
GIST	<p>Seven days into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies are coming under increasing pressure to do more to help Ukraine, even as they face diminishing options for doing so.</p> <p>As Russia continues its push to capture urban areas, one of the more drastic options discussed publicly has been a no-fly zone, which would stop Russian aircraft from launching strikes over Ukraine, eliminating a key military tactic. But the idea has been dismissed by the U.S. and NATO countries.</p> <p>"That is in many ways for many people, the unspoken question. Why not just engage militarily? But that's not something any NATO member is thinking of doing. And there's a reason for that, which is in order to</p>

have a no-fly zone above Ukraine, in the current circumstances, you would have to take decisions to shoot down Russian jets,” British Prime Minister [Boris Johnson](#) said Wednesday. “And that’s not something that any Western country is contemplating.”

British officials say that while the no-fly zone has been discussed at senior levels, it isn’t a realistic option given the risks of it provoking a direct conflict with Moscow.

Creating a continuous, effective no-fly zone over Ukraine, particularly with several NATO nations, would require several hundred planes, not only to uphold the no-fly zone but to support those aircraft maintaining that no-fly zone. In addition, air forces across multiple nations would have to coordinate. And, should Russia attack NATO-member aircraft, that would be seen as an attack on the 30-member alliance.

The British government has said it would instead continue to impose more sanctions on Russian individuals, deliver more weapons to Ukraine and make it easier for refugees fleeing the conflict to settle in the U.K.

Sanctions, however, won’t have an immediate effect on the battlefield, Western leaders have acknowledged. “This is going to take time,” President Biden said last week as the U.S. began rolling out [punitive financial measures](#) that included cutting off some of Russia’s largest banks from the global financial system.

However, officials hope that the unprecedented economic hit will bite the Russian economy rapidly, meaning that as the bombs fall on Kyiv, there will be Russian bank runs and Russian businesses collapsing, showing real-world consequences for Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#).

A no-fly zone could be part of an eventual peace agreement, one official said.

While NATO members have rejected any notion of direct intervention, they have recently increased their defensive presence, with more than 100 jets now at high alert, operating from 30 locations, more than 120 ships on patrol from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, and thousands more troops deployed to NATO’s east.

Mr. Putin’s reference to putting [his nation’s nuclear-weapons arsenal](#) on alert has also raised concerns among NATO allies about the potential risks of military involvement. There appears to be no consensus yet as to how the West would react to such an escalation, and one European diplomat suggested the nuclear-posture change was a bid to deflect attention away from the conduct of the war.

But if Mr. Putin did follow through with his threat, the nuclear-armed NATO members would put their nuclear arsenal on alert, officials said.

One NATO official speculated that Western countries could in such a scenario attempt to send more substantial support to Ukraine by private channels, without specifying what that would entail. A European official said this had already been discussed in government circles.

“The situation is escalating and Putin seems keen for it to escalate, he is following a logic of war,” the European official said.

On Friday, foreign ministers from NATO member states will hold emergency talks about Ukraine. Among the issues they will discuss, U.S. officials said, is how the alliance can support Ukraine, even though it is a non-NATO member. But officials conceded there aren’t many options.

“We can’t do much without being dragged into World War III—this has been our dilemma,” a NATO official said.

Even [the Western weapons shipments](#) now streaming into Ukraine via Poland could lead to an escalation of hostilities between Russia and NATO, some officials fear, and the alliance members are divided on how

much military assistance to provide. Over the weekend, the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said the bloc would send jet fighters to Ukraine, and, for the first time, finance member countries' deliveries of offensive weapons to Kyiv.

Several officials familiar with the discussions said that there was never any agreement on such a move, which had merely been discussed among foreign ministers of the bloc. On Tuesday, officials in several countries that have the types of aircraft Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly said they were unwilling to provide them despite Mr. Borrell's comment.

NATO and European officials said that there was a great concern about Russia attacking the supply lines that channel weapons and other materiel to Ukraine via Poland. The positioning of troops in Belarus as well as around Kyiv suggested that Russia was planning to cut off the western part of the country and end the shipments of arms and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

NATO members appear to accept that regardless of what measures they take, Mr. Putin appears set on widening the conflict. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Tuesday that [Russia's shelling of civilian infrastructure](#) and killing of civilians in Ukraine were likely only the beginning of a Russian escalation.

"Ukraine is literally fighting for its survival," Mr. Scholz said. "These will be very, very dramatic times." He pledged to continue to try to resolve the conflict with dialogue, but added that Mr. Putin has rejected all attempts to come to a peaceful agreement.

Weapons supplied by NATO countries have already helped Ukraine damage Russia's force of more than 150,000 troops. While Kyiv still holds little prospect of victory over the invading forces, the West hopes Ukraine's resilience in battle will change the balance of power in potential cease-fire talks, improving Kyiv's negotiating position.

Even if the Ukrainian government does fall, Western officials expect Ukrainians to keep fighting. "If Putin were to succeed and take control of the cities, that is not the end of the story," one European diplomat said Tuesday.

The early fighting by Ukrainian forces and citizens portends an insurgency even if Russia were to take control of population centers and stand up its own government. "I think [Putin] will have an insurgency on his hand that is going to be extremely wearing and degrading to him, to his military and to his economy," the European diplomat said. "Ordinary Russians will be paying the price of this hubris and this aggression."

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HEADLINE	03/02 For average Russians, sanctions begin bite
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/for-average-russians-western-sanctions-over-ukraine-war-begin-to-bite-11646254180
GIST	<p>MOSCOW—Viktoriya and Yevgeny Vinnikov had carefully planned for a trip this month to Bulgaria, even traveling hundreds of miles to get a Covid-19 vaccine that would allow them to enter the European Union.</p> <p>They were booked on the Hungarian low-cost carrier Wizz Air and had reservations at a cozy hotel in the capital, Sofia, and the ancient southern city of Plovdiv.</p> <p>Then came the sanctions.</p> <p>After Western countries, including European nations, shut their airspace, Russia hit back, banning flights by airlines from 36 countries, including Hungary. As a result, the Vinnikovs' vacation was scrapped. The couple doesn't know when they will be able to travel abroad again.</p>

“We used to go abroad at least two times a year,” said Ms. Vinnikov, a 56-year-old real-estate agent, adding that the canceled trip was a gift from her husband for International Women’s Day on March 8.

Since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine last month, the U.S. and Europe have unleashed a package of punishing sanctions against Russia’s economy, including restrictions on Russia’s central bank and cutting other major Russian banks’ access to the dollar and other reserve currencies. Plans are also in the works to sever some Russian lenders from the Swift global-payments messaging system.

The impact has already begun to reverberate.

Long lines have formed at some banks as the ruble continues to plummet and Russians rush to withdraw hard currency. Movie theaters have been forced to cancel the showing of American films, after U.S. studios Disney, Warner and Sony halted the release of films in Russia.

Netflix customers in Russia were unable to pay for their subscriptions with credit cards issued by some Russian banks, including Sberbank, Russia’s largest bank and a target of U.S. sanctions. The problem was soon resolved, according to Netflix.

Some Russians shelved plans to buy a new home after mortgage interest rates more than doubled to 20%. Meanwhile, Russians have started to stock up on products such as foreign medications out of fear they might become scarce or completely run out in the coming weeks and months. Around 55% of Russian medications are imported, according to 2021 data from the DSM Group, a Moscow-based marketing agency that specializes in pharmaceutical market research.

Olga Sazonova, 60, a St. Petersburg coach and psychologist who offers what she describes as “body mindfulness tours” to Europe and beyond, was slated to take a group of 12 people to the Maldives in April. That trip has now been shelved and she is waiting for a refund of her deposit from the hotel.

Realtor Tatyana Johnson said the increased mortgage rates had crippled the plans of several of her clients who had planned to take out a mortgage. At least two clients, who were about to buy second homes at a pre-sanctions interest rate of 11%, abandoned their plans.

“Of course, it’s become unbearable,” she said.

Ms. Johnson also had plans to fly to Serbia on Feb. 26, two days after the first set of sanctions were imposed. But the flight bans scotched those plans. While her airfare was refunded, Ms. Johnson lost the advance payment on her hotel.

“The sanctions were not justified” because they harm ordinary people, Ms. Johnson said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday that “the Russian economy has suffered a serious blow,” but he insisted “we are still standing.”

The Kremlin has retaliated against Western sanctions, including imposing a ban on the issuance of loans by Russian residents to foreigners and ordering exporters to sell 80% of their foreign-currency gains from exports. The government has also said it would spend one trillion rubles, equivalent to around \$9 billion, to buy shares in Russian companies.

Nonetheless, “the current situation is very difficult,” said Stepan Goncharov, an analyst at Levada Center, an independent Russian pollster. “It will lead to long-term consequences. It will have an effect not on only the middle class, but also the lower class, which is larger. They will also feel this change in their normal lives.”

Mr. Goncharov said these sanctions could have far-reaching domestic consequences because the low-income Russians who will bear the brunt of the sanctions comprise Russian President Vladimir Putin’s core political base.

	<p>Russian tech-savvy youth, who are more globally connected and are largely opposed to the Kremlin's military campaign, will also feel the pinch, Mr. Goncharov said, adding that the pain will spread through much of the population in the next several months.</p> <p>"I think for sanctions [people] will blame European countries and the U.S.A.," Mr. Goncharov said. "But of course, there will be a drop in the standard of living and for this, responsibility will be put on the government, because they couldn't make the economy self-efficient and defend ordinary people, and of course part of this blame will be put on the president as well."</p> <p>Thousands of Russians took to the streets across several cities last week to protest the war. Authorities used violence to disperse them and have since detained almost 6,900 for participating in unsanctioned demonstrations, according to OVD-Info, an activist group that monitors police detentions. Russian authorities have since quickly repressed other spontaneous demonstrations.</p> <p>On Wednesday, a post on the Twitter account of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny urged Russians around the world to come out in protest of authorities' attempts to quash opposition to the Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine.</p> <p>"We must, gritting our teeth and overcoming fear, come out and demand an end to the war. Each arrested person must be replaced by two newcomers," the tweet said.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Pentagon criticizes China for blaming US
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/2/pentagon-hits-china-blaming-us-not-russia-ukraine/
GIST	<p>The Pentagon on Wednesday criticized the Chinese government for not joining Western sanctions on Russia and falsely blaming the invasion of Ukraine on the United States.</p> <p>Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said public statements by Chinese government officials revealed tacit support for the Russian invasion.</p> <p>China's Foreign Ministry spokesmen, he noted, in recent days has tried to moderate Beijing's overt backing for the Russian military action by mentioning Ukrainian sovereignty.</p> <p>"But we haven't seen China join the list of countries that have enacted sanctions on Russia," Mr. Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon.</p> <p>Additionally, he said: "We haven't seen the Chinese blame Mr. Putin for the violence he's causing. Instead they have been blaming the United States, incredibly."</p> <p>Mr. Kirby said the Chinese have falsely asserted that American support for Ukraine precipitated the Russian attack.</p> <p>The Chinese appear to be sending a mixed message about the Ukrainian crisis and who is to blame, he noted.</p> <p>Mr. Kirby declined to comment on whether Chinese President Xi Jinping asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to delay the start of the Ukraine invasion until after the Beijing Olympic Games were over. The games ended Feb. 20 and the Russian invasion began four days later.</p> <p>On Feb. 4, the start of the games, Mr. Putin was in Beijing and signed a new cooperation agreement with Mr. Xi</p>

	<p>“We tried hard to prevent the war through diplomatic engagement,” Mr. Kirby said, adding that it should not have happened after the Olympics. “There was no reason it should have happened at all. It was unprovoked. Ukraine was never an aggressor.”</p> <p>On Taiwan, Mr. Kirby declined comment on whether China is increasing aerial and naval intimidation of the island state since the Russian invasion.</p> <p>“I have nothing more operationally to talk to you today in terms of Taiwan specifically,” he said. “I would just say that nothing’s changed about our belief in the one China policy and in the freedom of navigation through the Taiwan Strait.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Oil prices surge; markets spinning wildly
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/2/oil-tops-110-a-barrel-stocks-rise-after-powell-com/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK — Oil prices kept surging Wednesday and briefly topped \$110 per barrel as Russia’s war continues against Ukraine, but stocks and other markets were showing less fear than a day earlier.</p> <p>The S&P 500 was 1% higher in morning trading, while Treasury yields jumped to recover a sliver of their steep losses from the past week. Gold receded, and a measure of nervousness among stock investors on Wall Street was easing after swinging sharply in recent days.</p> <p>Markets have been spinning wildly as investors try, sometimes blindly, to gauge how large an impact two big forces will ultimately have. Most recently, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has caused prices to soar for oil and other commodities where the region is a major producer. On top of that are worries about what upcoming hikes in interest rates by the Federal Reserve and other central banks around the world will do to the economy and inflation.</p> <p>Fed Chair Jerome Powell said in testimony to Congress on Wednesday that he would support raising his central bank’s key interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point this month. That would be the first increase since 2018, but it would also be more modest than some investors along Wall Street earlier had been fearing, and gains for stocks accelerated following the comments.</p> <p>Powell also said the attack on Ukraine may have muddled conditions, with its impact on the U.S. economy “highly uncertain,” adding that “we’re never on autopilot.”</p> <p>The Fed is balancing a tightrope where it needs to raise interest rates enough to rein in the highest inflation in generations but not so much that it pushes the economy into a recession. All the while, higher interest rates tend to put downward pressure on stocks and most other investments.</p> <p>The yield on the 10-year Treasury jumped to 1.80% from 1.72% late Tuesday, while the two-year Treasury leaped even more to 1.47% from 1.31%. Yields, though, remain well below where they were before Russia’s invasion. The 10-year yield was above 2% last month, before it plunged as investors plowed into investments seen as safer amid worries about war.</p> <p>The price of U.S. oil jumped another 5.4% to \$108.99 per barrel, and it climbed as high as \$112.51 in the morning to touch its highest level since 2014. Brent crude, the international standard, rose 5% to \$110.20 per barrel.</p> <p>The surging oil prices are likely to push inflation only higher, which means the threat is rising for something investors have not seen for a long time: an economy that’s stagnating in the face of high inflation, something called “stagflation.”</p> <p>“The conspiracy of geopolitical uncertainty and stagflation-type impulses is a brutal shock,” Tan Boon Heng of Mizuho Bank said in a report.</p>

Oil prices rose despite an agreement by the United States and other major governments in the International Energy Agency to release 60 million barrels from strategic reserves to boost supplies.

“Markets dismissed the notion that 60 million barrels of strategic reserves released will be consequential to the risks of Russian supply jeopardized,” said Tan of Mizuho. “Russia pumps more than that in just six days.”

A more impactful announcement may come later Wednesday, as the leaders of OPEC and other major oil-producing countries decide whether to increase their own production by 400,000 barrels per day.

In the stock market, all the uncertainty has led to big swings not only by the day but also by the hour. Within the first hour of Wednesday’s trading, the S&P 500 bounced between a gain of 0.4% and 1.2% to follow up on its loss of 1.5% a day earlier.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average was 352 points higher, or 1.1%, at 33,647, as of 10:35 a.m. Eastern time. The Nasdaq composite was 0.4% higher.

Energy stocks helped lead the way as they rode higher energy prices, with those in the S&P 500 up 2.1%. Bank stocks were also strong, as higher longer-term interest rates can mean bigger profits for them making loans.

Ross Stores climbed 6.3% after it reported stronger profit for its latest quarter than analysts expected.

Ford jumped 4.4% after it said it was accelerating its transformation into an electric-vehicle company and split its EV and internal combustion operations into two individual businesses.

Stock markets around the world were mixed. France’s CAC 40 rose 1.2%, Germany’s DAX was up 0.2% and Japan’s Nikkei 225 fell 1.7%.

Russia’s central bank said stock trading on the Moscow exchange would remain closed Wednesday for a third day, though trading of currencies and precious metals would resume for the first time this week.

Late Tuesday, President Joe Biden announced he was joining U.S. allies in closing the country’s air space to Russian aircraft, the latest in a set of sanctions and other measures meant to isolate Russia.

But Biden also said in his annual State of the Union speech that he would try to cushion Americans against the impact of higher oil prices. “I will use every tool at our disposal to protect American businesses and consumers,” Biden said.

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HEADLINE	03/03 UN: Ukraine refugee exodus hits 1M
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/ukraine-war-refugee-exodus-has-reached-a-million-says-un-as-russia-takes-over-kherson
GIST	<p>The Black Sea port of Kherson has become the first major Ukrainian target to fall under the de facto control of Russia forces, as the United Nations said more than a million people had fled the country since the invasion began a week ago.</p> <p>As the international criminal court said it had begun collecting evidence of possible war crimes in Ukraine, Kherson’s mayor, Igor Kolykhaiev, said in a Facebook post early on Thursday that Russian troops were in control of the city hall and that residents should obey a curfew imposed by what he called the “armed visitors”.</p> <p>Amid conflicting reports about the fate of the strategically important city, Kolykhaiev said he had made “no promises” to the Russian forces and that he was “only interested in the normal life of our city! I just asked [them] not to shoot people”.</p>

Other restrictions imposed on the city include a curfew from 8pm until 6am with only cars transporting food, medicines and other necessities permitted to enter the city.

The Russian attack on the city left bodies strewn about the city streets, power outages, limited water and little food, the New York Times reported Kolykhaiev as saying in a separate interview. A group of about 10 armed Russian officers entered the city hall and informed him that they planned to set up a military administration, the mayor added.

Gennady Lakhuta, head of the regional administration, wrote on the messaging service Telegram late on Wednesday that the city had been overrun by Russian troops. "The [Russian] occupiers are in all parts of the city and are very dangerous," he said, according to Agence France-Presse.

Russian artillery and missiles have continued to bombard other major cities including the capital, Kyiv, where several large explosions were heard on Wednesday night and into Thursday morning.

In the second-biggest city, Kharkiv, a Ukrainian member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) monitoring mission was killed in a bombing.

There is also still believed to be fierce fighting in the port of Mariupol in the country's south-east where Ukrainian forces are surrounded by the Russian-aligned forces. "We cannot even take the wounded from the streets, from apartments, since the shelling does not stop," its mayor said, adding that Russian attacks had been repelled "with dignity".

Hundreds of civilians have been killed, according to UN estimates, although the real tally is feared to be much higher. Ukraine's government said on Wednesday nearly 6,000 Russian troops had been killed. Moscow said the figure was 498.

As the conflict entered its second week the UN high commissioner for refugees, Filippo Grandi, said there had been an "exodus" from Ukraine to neighbouring countries of more than one million people, or around 2% of the population of 44 million.

Grandi appealed for the "guns to fall silent" so humanitarian aid could reach millions more still inside the country, and cautioned that the flood of people escaping the war was far from over and could eventually total 4 million.

In another dramatic development, the UK and 37 other countries formally referred reports of atrocities committed in Ukraine to the international criminal court (ICC) on Wednesday, the largest such referral in the court's history.

Under ICC rules, such a referral from member states means the court's prosecutor, Karim Khan, has already been able to start collecting evidence for the investigation without waiting for the approval of ICC judges.

Britain's foreign secretary, Liz Truss, in statement: "Putin's military machine is targeting civilians indiscriminately and tearing through towns across Ukraine. An investigation by the international criminal court into Russia's barbaric acts is urgently needed and it is right that those responsible are held to account. The UK will work closely with allies to ensure justice is done."

In New York, an emergency session of the UN general assembly voted overwhelmingly to deplore Russia's invasion of Ukraine and called for the immediate withdrawal of its forces. Of the 193 member states, 141 voted for the resolution, 35 abstained, and five – Russia, Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea – voted against.

The resolution deplored Russian aggression against Ukraine “in the strongest terms” and demanded that “the Russian Federation immediately cease its use of force against Ukraine” and “immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces”.

The resolution is not legally binding, but is an expression of the views of the UN membership, aimed at increasing pressure on Moscow and its ally, Belarus.

The OSCE named the killed member of its monitoring team as Maryna Fenina, who died in Kharkiv while collecting supplies for her family.

The city has come under intense shelling by Russian forces in recent days, with police and university buildings bombarded and government offices reduced to rubble.

“In Kharkiv and other cities and towns in Ukraine, missiles, shells and rockets are hitting residential buildings and town centers, killing and injuring innocent civilians – women, men and children alike,” the OSCE said.

“We strongly condemn the increased shelling in urban areas,” it added, reiterating its call “on the Russian Federation for an immediate cessation of hostilities”.

The international effort to isolate Russia and cripple its economy also continued when the World Bank said on Wednesday it had stopped all programs in Russia and Belarus with immediate effect.

Russian oligarch’s were also being squeezed as German authorities reportedly seized the \$600m superyacht belonging to Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov in a Hamburg shipyard. It came after Roman Abramovich put English football club Chelsea up for sale, nearly 20 years after he took control.

A second round of talks between Ukraine and Russia is due to get under way on Thursday, Russian negotiators reportedly said, adding that a ceasefire was “on the agenda”. However, Ukraine’s foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, has said Moscow’s demands are unacceptable and Russia must stop bombing cities if any progress is to be made.

The war again wreaked havoc on financial markets as the price of Brent crude oil soared to more than \$117 a barrel on Thursday, marking a 20% rise this week. A range of other commodities such as aluminium, iron ore and wheat rose again, intensifying concerns that the global economy is going to be thrown off course by runaway inflation.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Paralympics bans Russia, Belarus athletes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/mar/03/russian-belarusian-athletes-banned-winter-paralympics-u-turn-ukraine
GIST	<p>A revolt among competing nations has forced the International Paralympic Committee to reverse its original decision and ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from this week’s Winter Games.</p> <p>On Wednesday the IPC had said that Russian and Belarusian athletes would be allowed to take part in competition in Beijing, under a neutral banner and with no place on the medal table. Less than 24 hours after the announcement, however, the president of the IPC, Andrew Parsons, announced a u-turn following protests and a threat of a boycott from national participating committees (NPCs).</p> <p>“In taking our decision yesterday we were looking at the long-term health and survival of the Paralympic Movement,” Parsons said. “We are fiercely proud of the principles and values that have made the Movement what it is today. However, what is clear is that the rapidly escalating situation has now put us in a unique and impossible position so close to the start of the Games.</p>

	<p>“In the last 12 hours an overwhelming number of members have been in touch with us and been very open, for which I am grateful. They have told us that if we do not reconsider our decision, it is now likely to have grave consequences for the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games. Multiple NPCs, some of which have been contacted by their governments, teams and athletes, are threatening not to compete.</p> <p>“With this in mind, and in order to preserve the integrity of these Games and the safety of all participants, we have decided to refuse the athlete entries from RPC and NPC Belarus.”</p> <p>The ban will affect around 83 athletes from the two countries. Parsons described the situation in the athletes’ village in Beijing as being “untenable” without the ban eing implemented due to the dissent among athletes as well as NPCs.</p> <p>The British Paralympic Authority were one of the organisations to have criticised the decision and the UK government had also asked that the IPC reconsider. The culture secretary, Nadine Dorries, welcomed the reversal.</p> <p>“I am pleased that the IPC has now come to the right decision,” she said. “The welfare of all the other competing athletes is of utmost importance and we are pleased the IPC also recognise that. The whole country will be fully behind our ParalympicsGB team at the Games.”</p> <p>Dorries is to chair an international meeting of sports ministers on Thursday to discuss how to further strengthen action against the Russian state. Among the items on the agenda are a complete boycott of Russian athletes in sporting events and an end to sporting investment in Russia.</p> <p>“The government wants to ensure the Russian state cannot use sport to legitimise its regime in any way and is asking domestic sporting bodies and international partners to leave no stone unturned in looking at how far they can go in punishing Putin’s regime,” a spokesperson said.</p> <p>Parsons, meanwhile, also apologised to athletes from Russia and Belarus for the action the IPC felt forced to take: “To the Para athletes from the impacted countries, we are very sorry that you are affected by the decisions your governments took last week in breaching the Olympic truce. You are victims of your governments’ actions.</p> <p>“I hope and pray that we can get back to a situation when the talk and focus is fully on the power of sport to transform the lives of persons with disabilities, and the best of humanity.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Germany seizes Russian oligarch’s yacht
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/germany-seizes-russian-billionaire-alisher-usmanovs-600m-superyacht-report
GIST	<p>German authorities have reportedly seized the \$600m superyacht belonging to Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov in a Hamburg shipyard.</p> <p>Usmanov was on a list of billionaires to face sanctions from the European Union in response to Russia’s 24 February invasion of Ukraine. It came as the French finance minister, Bruno Le Maire, said it had seized a yacht linked to Rosneft boss Igor Sechin in the Mediterranean port of La Ciotat.</p> <p>The finance ministry said the yacht was owned by an entity of which Sechin had been identified as the main shareholder.</p> <p>Usmanov’s 156-metre (512-foot) yacht Dilbar, valued at \$600m and regarded as the largest motor yacht in the world by gross tonnage, was seized by German authorities on Wednesday, according to a Forbes report based on three sources in the yacht industry.</p>

The yacht has been in the yards of shipbuilding firm Blohm+Voss since late October. A spokesperson for shipbuilding firm Blohm+Voss declined to give a statement when contacted by the Guardian, but said that all projects by shipbuilder Lürssen would be treated “in accordance with the law”.

Forbes reported that representatives for Usmanov did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ukraine’s advisor to the minister of internal affairs, Anton Geraschenko, responded to the report on Telegram by saying the yacht should be sent to Ukraine and refitted as a missile cruiser.

Usmanov bought Dilbar in 2016 for a reported cost of \$600m from German shipbuilder Lürssen, which custom-built it for him over 52 months.

The firm calls it “one of the most complex and challenging yachts ever built, in terms of both dimensions and technology.”

At the time of its launch, Lürssen CEO Peter Lürssen said: “Dilbar has the most advanced security technologies of any superyacht in the world. But the things you read about it containing an anti-aircraft missile defence system are all nonsense.”

At 15,917 tons, it’s the world’s largest motor yacht by gross tonnage, and is typically staffed by a crew of 96 people, with space for 24 passengers in 12 suites. It has the largest pool ever installed on a yacht as well as two helicopter pads, a sauna, a beauty salon, and a gym.

At least five other superyachts owned by Russian billionaires are now anchored or cruising in Maldives, an Indian Ocean island nation that does not have an extradition treaty with the US, ship tracking data showed.

The vessels’ arrival in the archipelago off the coast of Sri Lanka follows the imposition of severe western sanctions on Russia.

The Clio superyacht, owned by Oleg Deripaska, the founder of aluminium giant Rusal, who was sanctioned by the US in 2018, was anchored off the capital Male on Wednesday, according to shipping database MarineTraffic.

The Titan, owned by Alexander Abramov, a cofounder of steel producer Evraz, arrived on 28 February.

Three more yachts owned by Russian billionaires were seen cruising in Maldives waters on Wednesday, the data showed. They include the 88-metre (288 ft) Nirvana owned by Russia’s richest man, Vladimir Potanin. Most vessels were last seen anchored in Middle Eastern ports earlier in the year.

A spokesperson for Maldives’ government did not respond to a request for comment.

The US has said it will take strict action to seize property of sanctioned Russians.

“This coming week, we will launch a multilateral transatlantic taskforce to identify, hunt down, and freeze the assets of sanctioned Russian companies and oligarchs: their yachts, their mansions, and any other ill-gotten gains that we can find and freeze under the law,” the White House said in a tweet on Sunday.

Washington imposed sanctions on Deripaska and other influential Russians in 2018 because of their ties to president Vladimir Putin after alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US election, which Moscow denies.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Russia encircles Ukraine nuclear plant
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/russian-forces-surround-ukraines-biggest-nuclear-plant-sparking-un-concerns

The UN nuclear watchdog has voiced concern after Russian forces claimed to have surrounded Ukraine's biggest atomic plant, and called for its workers to be left alone to do their jobs.

Rafael Grossi, the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said the Russian government had informed the agency that its troops had taken control of the area around the Zaporizhzhia plant in south-eastern Ukraine, the second biggest in Europe, housing six of the country's 15 reactors.

In their [letter to the IAEA](#), Russian officials insisted that Ukrainian staff at the plant were continuing to "work on providing nuclear safety and monitoring radiation in normal mode of operation".

However, the Ukrainian state enterprise running the country's nuclear industry, Energoatom, accused the Russian military of "openly terrorizing employees of the station and residents of its satellite city Energodar".

Video footage shared on social media by a Ukrainian official showed crowds of Ukrainians forming a barrier between the Russian forces and the nuclear plant, blocking their advance.

The interior ministry official, Anton Gerashchenko, said in a Facebook post: "Russian generals – change your minds! Do not create conditions for the new Chernobyl! Radiation knows no nationalities, one does not spare anyone! Go around the Energodar and Zaporizhzhia."

Ukraine has asked the IAEA to declare a 30km safe zone around Ukraine's four nuclear power plants.

Grossi told the IAEA board of governors meeting in Vienna: "It is of critical importance that the armed conflict and activities on the ground around Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and any other of Ukraine's nuclear facilities in no way interrupts or endangers the facilities or the people working at and around them."

The IAEA also said that a feed of radiation data from Zaporizhzhia had been interrupted on Tuesday and that Ukraine's nuclear regulatory inspectorate (SNRIU) was trying to find out the reason for the break and to restore the flow of data.

Grossi also raised concern over a report from the SNRIU that since Russians took over the Chernobyl plant, site of the 1986 disaster in north western Ukraine near the Belarus border, the staff there had not been permitted to go home.

The US deputy envoy to the IAEA, Louis Bono, said: "The Ukrainian staff at the site have not been allowed to leave and have been forced to work multiple shifts. This added stress on staff performing critical tasks further jeopardizes the safety and security of the site and the public."

In his remarks Grossi said: "It is of utmost importance that the staff working at [the Chernobyl plant] are able to do their job safely and effectively, and that their personal wellbeing is guaranteed by those who have taken control,"

The remains of the reactor core which exploded in 1986 is buried under concrete at the site, and there are also spent fuel storage facilities and a large amount of radioactive dust in the topsoil of the surrounding area.

The churning up of the soil by Russian military vehicles caused limited radiation spikes. In a statement, Energoatom said: "Being in the exclusion zone now and apparently not having the skills to ensure personal safety when working in radioactively contaminated areas, the invaders are exposed to significant external and internal radiation, which will undoubtedly manifest itself in the form of cancer."

On Sunday, the Ukrainian authorities said Russian missiles had struck the site of a radioactive waste disposal facility in Kyiv. The day before, an electrical transformer in another waste facility in Kharkiv was

	<p>damaged. In both cases there was no radioactive release, but the incidents highlighted the potential threat of ecological disaster from a war underway in a country with an extensive nuclear industry.</p> <p>The American Nuclear Society (ANS), an association of industry professionals, is seeking to send material support to Ukraine to help nuclear workers there.</p> <p>“The staff at Ukraine’s nuclear power plants must be able to fulfill their duties without interruption undue pressure or the fear of being killed or injured,” the ANS said in a statement. “Ukraine’s nuclear workers need their rest between shifts, access to their homes and a peace of mind that their loved ones are safe.</p> <p>The society’s president, Steven Nesbit, said he hoped that the Russian invaders were aware of the dangers of a nuclear accident.</p> <p>“All I can say is it’s hard to believe that they wouldn’t have a sensitivity to the issues here,” Nesbit said. “Russia and Vladimir Putin need to be taking all steps they can to avoid becoming even more of a pariah nation than they have become.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 London Stock Exchange suspends firms
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/03/london-stock-exchange-suspends-trading-in-27-firms-with-strong-links-to-russia
GIST	<p>The London Stock Exchange has suspended trading in 27 companies with strong links to Russia, including energy and banking giants Gazprom and Sberbank.</p> <p>The LSE said it was moving to block trading in the companies, which also include EN+, Lukoil and Polys, with immediate effect “in light of market conditions, and in order to maintain orderly markets”.</p> <p>International pressure is taking an increasing toll on Russian businesses, while the invasion of Ukraine is also disrupting those with operations in the region, with miners Evraz, in which Roman Abramovich owns a 29% stake, and Polymetal dropping out of the FTSE 100 in its quarterly review as their market values have plummeted.</p> <p>On Friday, the LSE suspended VTB Capital, a subsidiary of Russia’s second-largest bank VTB, from trading. Earlier this week, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) suspended trading in the bank’s global depository receipts on the LSE, where it has a secondary listing. Its main listing is in Moscow.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Sberbank, Russia’s biggest lender, announced it was pulling out of the European market, after it said it faced large outflows of cash in the region as well as threats to the safety of its employees and branches.</p> <p>The announcement came only hours after the European Central Bank ordered the closure of Sberbank Europe, warning that the business could fail following a run on deposits because of Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The LSE, which said that its own operations in Russia and Ukraine account for less than 1% of total income, added that it would “continue to keep this situation under review”.</p> <p>LSE reported an almost doubling of pre-tax profits from £492m in pandemic-hit 2020 to £987m last year. Total income more than tripled year-on-year from £2bn to £6.4bn.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Day 8: Russia invasion of Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/russia-ukraine-war-russian-invasion-news-what-we-know-so-far-on-day-seven

GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian forces are in control of the local government building in the Black Sea port of Kherson, according to its mayor, Igor Kolykhaiev, although there are conflicting reports about the status of the strategically important city. • More heavy explosions were reported in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and second city, Kharkiv, overnight and on Thursday morning after Russian missile strikes. • A second round of talks is reportedly set to take place today. A Russian negotiator said a ceasefire was on the agenda, but Ukraine has said Russia must stop bombing Ukrainian cities before any progress can be made. • More than one million people have fled Ukraine since Russian forces invaded the country last week, the head of the United Nations refugee agency has said. • The international criminal court (ICC) is opening an investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine and has begun collecting evidence after 38 countries formally referred reports of atrocities, the largest referral it has ever received. • The Russian advance on Kyiv has been delayed by "staunch Ukrainian resistance, mechanical breakdown and congestion" and is still more than 30km from the centre of the city, Britain's defence ministry said. • The UN nuclear watchdog has voiced concern after Russian forces claimed to have surrounded Ukraine's biggest atomic plant and called for its workers to be left alone to do their jobs. • The strategically important Sea of Azov port city of Mariupol is reportedly surrounded by Russian troops. • Police in Moscow detained two women and five children holding a poster outside the Ukraine embassy that said "No to war". • More than 350 Ukrainian civilians have been killed and more than 2,000 injured, according to Ukraine's emergency service. Transport facilities, hospitals, kindergartens and homes have been destroyed, it said. • Ukraine claimed nearly 7,000 Russian troops had been killed in the first six days of Moscow's invasion. Moscow said 498 Russian soldiers had died in Ukraine since the start of its campaign, its first statement on casualties. • The UN general assembly voted overwhelmingly to deplore Russia's invasion of Ukraine and called for the immediate withdrawal of its forces, with 141 of the 193 member states voting for the resolution on Wednesday. • The US has accused Russia of launching a "full war on media freedom and the truth" by blocking independent news outlets and preventing Russians from hearing news of the invasion of Ukraine. • Russia's central bank has imposed a 30% commission on foreign currency purchases by individuals on currency exchanges. • Russian and Belarusian athletes have been banned from the Winter Paralympic Games for their countries' roles in the conflict, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said, in a reversal of its previous stance.
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HEADLINE	03/02 New Zealand police, protesters clash
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/australia/new-zealand-protest-vaccine.html
GIST	<p>For more than three weeks, hundreds of protesters have disabled the center of New Zealand's capital city, occupying the area in front of Parliament and issuing increasingly violent threats to politicians and other public figures in an ostensible battle against the country's vaccine mandates.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the 23rd day of the protest, the police began an aggressive clampdown, descending on the site in Wellington at 6 a.m., dismantling tents, toilets, a kitchen and other camp infrastructure, and urging the demonstrators to leave. Eventually, most did — but not without a fight.</p> <p>In chaotic and sometimes bloody clashes, protesters wielded fire extinguishers, paint-filled projectiles, homemade plywood shields and pitchforks. Some lobbed cobblestones at officers. Others piled detritus onto gas-fueled fires, including one that caused an explosion at a playground near Parliament.</p>

Protest leaders, against a soundtrack of the national anthem and the 1980s Maori pop song “Poi E,” urged demonstrators to hold the line and called the police “the Gestapo.” Officers, many bearing riot shields, responded with pepper spray and rubber bullets. At least 60 people were arrested, and three officers were taken to hospitals.

Such scenes are rare in New Zealand, a country known for its relative remoteness, serenity and stability. In this case, though, the police had expected “hostility, resistance and violence,” Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said at a news conference. “That is what they and Wellingtonians have experienced for several weeks now.”

As the protest entrenched itself, she said, the police had avoided escalating the situation. But growing violence had left officers few alternatives in “trying to bring this occupation to a conclusion.”

The occupation, which was inspired by the recent antigovernment protest by truck drivers in the Canadian capital, Ottawa, was a response to New Zealand’s highly restrictive approach to the pandemic, which allowed the country to go months without a single case of community transmission.

The restrictions appear to have alienated a small group of New Zealanders, many of whom have been left without work after refusing to abide by the country’s sweeping vaccine mandates.

The first days of the protest had a peaceful, even carnivalesque, atmosphere as demonstrators spread mud and hay on the lawn outside Parliament and set up their campsite.

But over the weeks that followed, the makeup of the crowd changed, resulting in far greater violence and forcing the police to intervene, Andrew Coster, the police commissioner, said at a news conference on Wednesday. “The harm being done far outweighs any legitimate protest,” he added.

The protest was unpopular from the start: In a poll conducted about a week into it, 61 percent of those surveyed opposed the occupation. Over time, hostility toward the protesters grew even larger, particularly as people living in Wellington encountered blocked-off streets, harassment and violence from demonstrators, and an increasingly smelly protest site.

As in Canada and other places racked by pandemic-related protests, a segment of people demonstrating against virus restrictions in New Zealand were gradually subsumed into the far right.

In a working paper published late last year, members of the New Zealand think tank Te Punaha Matatini had warned that the two groups were merging in a troubling way. “The most recent Covid-19 outbreak and the vaccine are highly visible, potent symbols used to push various far-right and conservative ideologies,” the authors of the paper wrote.

“Telegram channels and groups proliferate content which is violent, far-right and related to the conspiracy theory QAnon, signaling a near-frictionless shifting of New Zealanders from vaccine hesitancy, to vaccine resistance and then to content reflective of wider conspiratorial ideologies,” they added.

By dusk on Wednesday, the police had cleared most of the protest site, prompting some remaining demonstrators to flee rather than face them. Some descended on the city’s nearby central train station, and at least one group headed for camper van parking areas in Porirua, 10 miles north of the capital. Several dozen people remained on the streets in the area around Parliament.

Speaking at the news conference, Ms. Ardern praised the police and said two reviews would take place to determine if more could have been done to prevent the occupation. She expressed hope that the day’s events would not change how New Zealanders recalled the pandemic response.

“When we look back on this period in our history, I hope we remember one thing,” Ms. Ardern said. “Thousands more lives were saved in the past two years by your actions as New Zealanders than were on that front lawn of Parliament today.”

HEADLINE	03/02 Asia's mixed reaction to Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/asia/asia-russia-ukraine-war.html
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE — Much of the world has united against Russia in the aftermath of its incursion into Ukraine. Envoys have walked out of meetings rather than listen to a top Russian diplomat speak. Western nations have been in near lock step on international sanctions. Bartenders are banning Russian vodka.</p> <p>In Asia, the reaction has been far more mixed.</p> <p>Generals in Myanmar have called Russia's actions "the right thing to do." India abstained from a United Nations Security Council resolution to condemn the attack. China has refused to call the assault on Ukraine an invasion. And in Vietnam, Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, is being affectionately referred to as "Uncle Putin."</p> <p>While most American allies in the region have fallen in line, authoritarian governments and those with weaker ties to the West have been more reluctant to act on the conflict in Ukraine. Across the Asia-Pacific, only Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Australia have agreed to international sanctions against Moscow. Taiwan, the self-governed territory that China claims as its own, has also agreed to sanctions and voiced support for Ukraine.</p> <p>The uneven response is unlikely to counterbalance the onslaught of Western anger, but it could test the limits of President Biden's pledge to make Mr. Putin a "pariah on the international stage."</p> <p>Russia's influence in Asia is minimal compared with that of the United States, though it has grown in recent years, with a particular focus on arms sales. Already, the economic ministry in Moscow announced last Friday that it would seek to expand economic and trade ties with Asia to help offset Western sanctions.</p> <p>"I don't think we will shun Russia," said Bilahari Kausikan, Singapore's former ambassador to Russia. "It is still a big country and is a nuclear weapons state." It is also a permanent member of the Security Council, a status that is unlikely to change, Mr. Kausikan said.</p> <p>Russia has sold fighter jets to Indonesia, Malaysia and Myanmar, but its biggest customer in Southeast Asia is Vietnam. From 2000 to 2019, 84 percent of Vietnam's weapons imports came from Russia, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.</p> <p>In its bid to counter China, Vietnam has bought billions of dollars worth of Russian artillery, aircraft and submarines, transforming its military into one of Southeast Asia's most capable fighting forces while making itself dependent on Moscow for years to come.</p> <p>In India, Moscow has been seen as a reliable military partner for decades. New Delhi is the world's second-largest importer of Russian arms, which account for about half of its military supplies. When Mr. Putin visited New Delhi late last year, Russia detailed the sale of a \$5.4 billion missile defense system to the country.</p> <p>India has been careful not to condemn Russia over Ukraine and upset a time-tested friendship at a moment when China is threatening to encroach on its northeastern border. Moscow repeatedly used its veto power at the Security Council to block resolutions critical of India over Kashmir, a disputed territory India shares with Pakistan. In return, India abstained from a U.N. resolution condemning Moscow over its annexation of Crimea in 2014.</p> <p>Indian officials said last week that they may even help Russia find workarounds for the new sanctions by setting up rupee accounts to continue trade with Moscow, similar to what it did after the annexation of Crimea.</p>

“Whose side is India on?” said Pankaj Saran, India’s former ambassador to Russia. “We are on our side. The cyclical bursts of Cold War antagonism are tiresome.”

Indonesia, like India, has significantly increased its economic and defense ties with Russia over the years. Bilateral trade between the two countries rose to \$2.74 billion in 2021, a 42.2 percent increase from the year before. Palm oil makes up about 38 percent of Indonesia’s exports to Russia.

In December 2021, Jakarta hosted the first-ever joint maritime exercise between Russia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN.

“Indonesia does not see Russia as a threat to global politics or as a foe,” said Dinna Prapto Raharja, an associate professor in international relations at Bina Nusantara University in Jakarta. “Unilateral sanctions limit the chance for negotiation and heightens the sense of insecurity to the affected countries,” she added.

Last Thursday, Teuku Faizasyah, a spokesman for Indonesia’s Foreign Ministry, suggested that the country had no intention of imposing sanctions against Moscow, arguing it would “not blindly follow the steps taken by another country.”

Where the United States has been quick to criticize Russia for its policies, Mr. Putin’s brand of authoritarian politics has appealed to many countries across Asia, and especially in Southeast Asia, where strongman rule is often favored.

In a 2017 Pew Research Center global survey, more than half those polled in the Philippines and Vietnam said they trusted Mr. Putin. At the height of the pandemic, Moscow donated Covid-19 vaccines to the Philippines, Vietnam and Laos.

“I am a big fan of Uncle Putin because he always takes drastic actions,” said Tran Trung Hieu, 28, an independent filmmaker in Hanoi, using the same term of respect that locals use for Ho Chi Minh, the revolutionary who led the independence movement in Vietnam.

Rodrigo Duterte, the president of the Philippines, has called Mr. Putin his “favorite hero.” The Philippines on Monday said it condemned the invasion in Ukraine but did not name Russia. Last week, Vietnam refrained from singling Russia out as an aggressor, and instead called on “all relevant parties to exercise restraint.”

Two editors for a Vietnamese online magazine and Vietnam National Television said they were told to censor themselves in their reports on the war, including reducing the extent and frequency of coverage, and banning the word “invasion.” Both asked to remain anonymous for fear of government reprisals.

But no country in Southeast Asia has been more supportive of Russia since the invasion than Myanmar, where the military seized power in a coup 13 months ago. Senior military officers from both nations, including Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of Myanmar’s regime, exchanged visits several times last year.

Last week, Maj. Gen Zaw Min Tun, the spokesman for the junta, told The New York Times that Moscow had “done its part to maintain its sovereignty,” and that the attack was “the right thing to do.” Russia has continued to sell arms to Myanmar after the coup, despite warnings as a humanitarian crisis unfolds.

On Monday, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine called for an international tribunal to investigate Russia for war crimes, but governments in Asia have long understood that being vocal about human rights abuses risks inviting unwanted scrutiny on repressive policies at home.

Thailand, a treaty ally of the United States, has said little about the war except that it supported “ongoing efforts to find a peaceful settlement.” Thitinan Pongsudhirak, director of the Institute of Security and International Studies at Bangkok’s Chulalongkorn University, called that stance “sitting on the fence and not wanting to get down from the fence at all.”

	<p>“When Thailand engages abroad, it is concerned, it is fearful that there will be questions about domestic issues in Thailand,” Mr. Pongsudhirak said. The country quelled recent nationwide protests by arresting dozens of young people.</p> <p>Even among the stalwart American allies in Asia, the decision to punish Russia has included some hesitation.</p> <p>South Korea, after a delay, said it would implement sanctions imposed by the United States and Europe but would not enact its own penalties. Officials said the country needed “to keep in mind that our trade relations with Russia are growing.” By contrast, Japan’s prime minister, Fumio Kishida, was quick to condemn Russian aggression and announce sanctions.</p> <p>In an interview, Kateryna Zelenko, Ukraine’s ambassador to Singapore, said a refusal to stop Russia would ultimately compromise global security. “It must be clear that keeping silent and standing neutral” is a form of consent, Ms. Zelenko said.</p> <p>She added: “We really hope that everyone soon understands that in this terrible war, nobody will be able to sit out.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Hong Kong leaves most vulnerable in cold
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/business/hong-kong-covid.html
GIST	<p>HONG KONG — For Chan Shun Ki, a cleaner at a construction site in Hong Kong, getting over the coronavirus was the easy part.</p> <p>Ms. Chan was anxious to return to work after missing more than a week last month while recovering. She had already skipped her rent payment after the pandemic wiped out her previous jobs cleaning hotels and waiting tables. She was borrowing money from relatives to make up for the loss of her \$83 daily wage.</p> <p>But then she received a text message from the government health system, which was battling days-long backlogs. It ordered her to stay home for two more weeks because her coronavirus test had come back positive. She had taken it 12 days earlier.</p> <p>“I feel so much pressure,” said Ms. Chan, who is a single mother of a 15-year-old. “The government is really incompetent, and it leaves us residents not knowing what to do.”</p> <p>As Hong Kong sinks under its fifth, and worst, coronavirus wave, the brunt is falling upon its most vulnerable: migrants, racial minorities, the working class. While the city has long been one of the most unequal on earth, rarely has the cost of that inequality been as steep as now.</p> <p>That is, in part, because of the sheer scale of this wave, which in two months has led to more than 250,000 infections and 800 deaths — multiple times as many as in the previous four waves combined. Bodies have piled up in hospital hallways because morgues have no more room. Older patients have been left on gurneys outdoors.</p> <p>But the suffering has also been exacerbated, some say, by government policy. Under direction from the central Chinese authorities, Hong Kong officials have insisted on some of the world’s most stringent social distancing rules, crippling many service industries. Yet, they have failed to contain the virus.</p> <p>As a result, poor residents in cramped apartments have spread the virus to their families because the government has run out of isolation facilities. Those who recover cannot return to work because the testing jam means they cannot prove they are negative.</p> <p>Migrant domestic workers, predominantly Southeast Asian women who work as caregivers and cleaners, have been fired after getting sick and forced to sleep on the streets. (Hong Kong law requires</p>

the workers to live in their employers' homes.) Vegetable prices have soared, but the government has offered limited cash relief.

At times, officials have actively challenged efforts to help the needy. A top official threatened to prosecute members of the public who raised funds for migrant workers fined for violating social distancing rules.

[Roger Chung](#), a professor of public health ethics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said the containment measures risked doing as much harm to low-income residents as the virus itself.

"I don't think the goal of protecting people's health from Covid-19 is the only incontestable goal" in policymaking, he said. "Because these policies can also take a toll on other people's well-being, especially in destabilizing their income and livelihoods."

Even before the pandemic, Hong Kong's inequality was staggering. It has more [billionaires](#) than any city but New York, yet more than 200,000 residents live in [carved-up tenement homes](#) where the average living space per person is 48 square feet.

Amid the pandemic, those often dilapidated living quarters are even more perilous. The plumbing is frequently reconfigured to accommodate the multiple households sharing one apartment, and faulty installation can allow the virus to spread between floors. Insufficient ventilation has also fueled transmission.

Social distancing is impossible. Ms. Chan, the single mother, shares a one-room apartment with her son. Days after she fell sick, he did, too.

Some residents, desperate to avoid infecting their relatives, have slept on their rooftops [or in stairwells](#). The Society for Community Organization, a nonprofit organization, [said](#) that it had received calls for help from nearly 300 people who were isolating at home, without access to food or medical supplies, since the fifth wave began in January.

The lack of isolation facilities has proved equally, if not more, challenging for migrant domestic workers, who make up about 10 percent of the working population, have few legal rights and often [suffer discrimination](#).

Inah, an Indonesian worker who has been in Hong Kong for three years, began coughing on Feb. 21. Her employer ordered her not to return to the house until she had a negative test result, said Inah, who insisted on being identified only by her first name for fear of losing her job.

For hours, she stood in the rain outside her employer's home. Finally, around midnight, her employer allowed her in, ordering her to go straight to her room without using the restroom, Inah said. In the morning, she was kicked out again.

"Why do you just push me; you never helped me with anything?" said Inah, who eventually found a place to stay through the nonprofit [HELP for Domestic Workers](#).

HELP's executive director, Manisha Wijesinghe, said that, over five days in February, the group took in nearly 70 workers who had become homeless after testing positive.

Hong Kong's Labor Department said in a statement that firing domestic workers for illness was illegal. But the authorities themselves have been accused of discrimination. Last month, after the government tightened restrictions on group gatherings, the police [announced](#) they had conducted a raid in an area where domestic workers "commonly gather" and issued 17 tickets. The \$640 per person fine is more than the workers' minimum monthly wage.

In response, some residents organized an online fund-raiser, collecting \$14,000 in three days. Then the labor secretary, Law Chi-kwong, accused them of encouraging illegal activity and [said he would consider](#) legal action. The organizers shut down the fund-raiser.

Even residents who have avoided infection are straining under the pandemic's economic burden. The prices of vegetable shot up after [one-fifth](#) of the city's vegetable truck drivers were left unable to work because of quarantine rules. (About 90 percent of Hong Kong's produce comes from mainland China.) In late February, the average cost of Chinese lettuce was nearly three times as high as the price a month earlier, according to [official statistics](#). Prices for tomatoes and potatoes have nearly doubled.

Chan Lap To, who owns a vegetable stand on western Hong Kong Island, said most customers were buying less than usual. But he had to hike prices. In addition to running the stall, he also sold vegetables to hotels and restaurants, and that business had plummeted by half because of the unstable supply and weak demand.

He said he had not received any government aid to make up for his losses. "This is very unfair for all Hong Kong people," Mr. Chan said. "It's all connected."

The government has offered financial support for certain industries, and last week, officials [proposed](#) a nearly \$22 billion relief package, including roughly \$1,300 vouchers for most residents. But some businesses [have been excluded](#) from the previous subsidies. And the vouchers are digital, meaning they [cannot be used for rent](#) or at ubiquitous stalls like Mr. Chan's that accept only cash.

Hong Kong also does not have unemployment insurance. The government [pledged last month](#) to give one-time \$1,300 payments to people who lost their jobs in the fifth wave. But those who became unemployed earlier were not eligible.

For Ms. Chan, the government's promises may bring temporary relief. But what she really wants is to get back to work. To do that, she would welcome even more draconian measures, such as a citywide lockdown, to get coronavirus cases under control.

"Dragging along like this, so I can't work for several months — this is no way to do things," she said. "Short-term pain is better than long-term pain."

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HEADLINE	03/02 Russia hits civilian targets; Kerson falls
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/kherson-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	<p>ODESSA, Ukraine — Russian forces on Wednesday seized the first major Ukrainian city in their onslaught, the strategic port of Kherson, as they stepped up bombardment of civilian targets across the country, put other cities under siege and pushed to encircle and cut off the capital, Kyiv.</p> <p>Russian troops and tanks rolled into Kherson, on the Dnieper River near the Black Sea, after days of intense fighting that left as many as 300 Ukrainian civilians and fighters dead, said the mayor and another senior Ukrainian government official who confirmed that it had fallen. "There is no Ukrainian army here," the mayor, Igor Kolykhaev, said in an interview. "The city is surrounded."</p> <p>Other Russian columns besieged Kharkiv, the country's second-largest city, and the port city of Mariupol. And most ominously, a huge convoy of military vehicles stood north of Kyiv in apparent preparation for a major offensive.</p> <p>The battle for control of Kherson, a shipbuilding center, left bodies strewn about the city streets, power outages, limited water and little food, Mr. Kolykhaev said. Utility workers have tried to fix damaged pipes and downed lines, he said, but have come under fire from snipers.</p>

He said a group of about 10 armed Russian officers, including the commander of forces attacking the city, had entered the city hall and informed him that they planned to set up a military administration.

The nearly week-old Russian invasion at first drew global attention to attacks on the two largest cities, Kyiv and Kharkiv in the north, but it appeared to be making more progress in the south. Capturing Kherson could clear the way for Russian forces to push westward toward Odessa — a much bigger prize — as they try to seize Ukraine's entire Black Sea coast, cutting it off from world shipping.

Russian troops have gained ground near Mariupol while naval forces gathered offshore, raising fears of an amphibious assault on a city where local officials said there was no power or heat.

Mariupol lies on the Sea of Azov, a body bordered on three sides by Russia, which controls access to it. The port is part of a vital stretch of terrain Russia is apparently trying to capture, to link Russian-backed separatist enclaves in the southeast with Crimea, the southern peninsula Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014. That could trap the Ukrainian troops arrayed against the breakaway region in a pincer, caught between Russian forces to the east and west.

A day after President Biden vowed in a defiant State of the Union address that the war would “leave Russia weaker and the world stronger” and that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia “has no idea what’s coming,” the West further tightened the retaliatory economic squeeze that has the Russian economy reeling. U.S. and European sanctions have hit the Russian government, its ally Belarus, Russian businesses, powerful individuals and their assets abroad.

Russian artillery and rocket fire have cut off essentials like electricity, medicine, water and heat to many Ukrainian communities, and turned a growing number of offices, homes, businesses and vehicles to crumpled, burning hulks. Around the country, people are sheltering in basements and tunnels as explosions shake the ground above them. In Kyiv alone, some 15,000 people are sleeping in the subways.

“These aren’t military targets,” Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said on Wednesday. “They are places where civilians work and families live.”

Ukraine is mounting stiffer resistance than either its allies or Russia had expected, six days into a war that has already left thousands of casualties and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. And the United States and its allies, their stance against Moscow hardening with each passing day, are funneling an array of weapons into Ukraine, in addition to punishing Russia economically.

Western officials say Mr. Putin set out to destroy Ukraine's military, install a puppet regime in Kyiv that would never be aligned with NATO or the European Union, and perhaps absorb some territory into Russia. But he “badly miscalculated,” Mr. Biden said on Tuesday, and the crisis raises a set of harsh questions that the Russian leader may not be prepared to answer if he anticipated a quick capitulation.

Is this just the start of a long, grinding war that would be unpopular in Russia and could devastate Ukraine's major cities? And how much physical ruin of Ukraine and financial ruin of Russia is he prepared to accept as the price of getting his way?

“We’ve hardly slept for seven nights,” President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said early Wednesday in a video message. But, he added, “Today you, Ukrainians, are a symbol of invincibility.”

His government said on Wednesday that Russian attacks had killed more than 2,000 civilians and an unknown number of Ukrainian troops. Russia said 498 of its troops had died, the largest military toll it has acknowledged since the 1999-2000 war in Chechnya, and it has said that Ukrainian losses were much higher. Western officials said that in fact Russia's military was suffering hundreds of wounded or killed each day. But all such figures are unverifiable estimates.

Ukrainian civilians in several cities have built barriers they hope will stop or slow Russian columns, while videos and still images have shown others standing in front of armored vehicles or scolding Russian soldiers.

Russian forces have so far refrained from pushing into the hearts of most cities — which would risk brutal street fighting that could partly negate their technological advantages — instead massing on the outskirts and shelling from a distance.

[Videos verified](#) by The New York Times show blasted, burning apartment buildings in Borodyanka, northwest of Kyiv. Explosions struck two [large buildings in Kharkiv](#) on Wednesday, setting ablaze one that housed Kharkiv National University, a day after a strike on a government building in the city. The mayor of Mariupol said 120 civilians there had been hospitalized with war wounds.

A Pentagon official said that Russian forces were suffering logistical problems, and warned that they were likely to become less precise in targeting their missile and artillery attacks as the fighting continues. The official briefed reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence assessments.

The U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said on Wednesday that Russia had used thermobaric weapons — also known as vacuum bombs or fuel-air explosives — that can create enormous blasts and indiscriminate destruction.

The high-caliber weapons used by Russian forces left many of the dead in Kherson unrecognizable, said Mr. Kolykhaev, the mayor, so volunteers were burying them in mass graves.

“Many of the bodies have been blown apart,” the mayor said. “If we can make a photograph it makes sense to try to identify them, but if not we put them into bags and bury them that way.”

The European Union for the first time will finance the purchase and delivery of weapons for Ukraine, rather than just leaving that to individual member nations as it has until now, said Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission. A French official said the bloc would establish a hub in Poland for handling aid and weapons shipments.

Ukraine appealed to the United Nations and the Red Cross to establish a humanitarian corridor to ferry medical and other supplies into cities and civilians out, but said Russian forces had rebuffed the idea.

In an emergency meeting on the crisis, the U.N. General Assembly voted 141 to 5 in favor of a resolution condemning Russia’s actions, with only Russia, Belarus, North Korea, Syria and Eritrea opposed. Thirty-five countries abstained, including China, India, Pakistan and Iran. Almost half of those abstaining were in Africa, where Russia has cultivated some strong relationships, and where the sparse supply of Covid-19 vaccines has fueled existing tensions with the United States and Europe.

The purpose of the United Nations “is to prevent war and to condemn war and to stop war,” the U.S. ambassador, Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield, told the assembly. “That is our job here today. This is the job you were sent here to do.”

The Belarusian ambassador, Valentin Rybakov, defended Russia and denounced sanctions against it as “economic and financial terrorism.”

Russian and Ukrainian officials had said diplomats from the two countries would meet Wednesday for a second round of talks on resolving the crisis, but the meeting was postponed amid a disagreement over the location.

Mr. Blinken announced “sweeping sanctions on Russia’s defense sector,” including the weapons manufacturers that make “the very systems now being used to assault Ukraine’s people.”

	<p>The United States and its allies have cut off Russian access to much banking and international commerce, blocked imports and exports, and frozen Russian assets held abroad. Mr. Biden also said Russian airlines would be banished from American airspace. The European Union and the United States both announced a fresh round of sanctions on Wednesday against Belarus, which Russia has used as a base for its drive on Kyiv.</p> <p>Mr. Putin on Wednesday banned anyone in Russia from taking more than \$10,000 in foreign currency out of the country. He had built up an enormous reserve of foreign cash to weather such a crisis, but American officials say the sanctions are blocking access to much of it.</p> <p>After Russian stocks plummeted following the first rounds of sanctions, the government shut down the Moscow Stock Exchange on Monday, and it remained closed Tuesday and Wednesday. The ruble's value has tumbled to record lows, despite efforts by Russia's central bank to prop it up, and interest rates have more than doubled.</p> <p>In Russian cities, thousands of people have been arrested for protesting the war, and the imprisoned opposition leader Aleksei A. Navalny called for more people to take to the streets to oppose a conflict "unleashed by our obviously insane czar."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Coronavirus steals sense of smell
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/health/covid-smell.html
GIST	<p>Few of Covid-19's peculiarities have piqued as much interest as anosmia, the abrupt loss of smell that has become a well-known hallmark of the disease. Covid patients lose this sense even without a stuffy nose; the loss can make food taste like cardboard and coffee smell noxious, occasionally persisting after other symptoms have resolved.</p> <p>Scientists are now beginning to unravel the biological mechanisms, which have been something of a mystery: The neurons that detect odors lack the receptors that the coronavirus uses to enter cells, prompting a long debate about whether they can be infected at all.</p> <p>Insights gleaned from new research could shed new light on how the coronavirus might affect other types of brain cells, leading to conditions like "brain fog," and possibly help explain the biological mechanisms behind long Covid — symptoms that linger for weeks or months after the initial infection.</p> <p>The new work, along with earlier studies, settles the debate over whether the coronavirus infects the nerve cells that detect odors: It does not. But the virus does attack other supporting cells that line the nasal cavity, the researchers found.</p> <p>The infected cells shed virus and die, while immune cells flood the region to fight the virus. The subsequent inflammation wreaks havoc on smell receptors, proteins on the surface of the nerve cells in the nose that detect and transmit information about odors.</p> <p>The process alters the sophisticated organization of genes in those neurons, essentially short-circuiting them, the researchers reported.</p> <p>Their paper significantly advances the understanding of how cells critical to the sense of smell are affected by the virus, despite the fact that they are not directly infected, said Dr. Sandeep Robert Datta, an associate professor of neurobiology at Harvard Medical School, who was not involved in the study.</p> <p>"It's clear that indirectly, if you affect the support cells in the nose, lots of bad things happen," Dr. Datta said. "The inflammation in the adjacent cells triggers changes in the sensory neurons that prevent them from working properly."</p>

Indeed, many complications of Covid appear to be caused by the immune system's friendly fire as it responds to infection by flooding the bloodstream with inflammatory proteins called cytokines, which can damage tissue and organs.

"This might be a general principle: that a lot of what the virus is doing to us is a consequence of its ability to generate inflammation," Dr. Datta said.

The new study is based on research carried out at Zuckerman Institute and Irving Medical Center at Columbia University in New York; the New York University Grossman School of Medicine; the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York; Baylor Genetics in Houston; and the School of Medicine at the University of California, Davis. The research was published online in Cell in early February.

The scientists examined golden hamsters and human tissue specimens from 23 patients who succumbed to Covid. After the hamsters were infected with the original coronavirus, scientists tracked the damage to their olfactory systems over time.

(How do you know a golden hamster has lost its sense of smell? You don't feed it for several hours and then bury Cocoa Puffs in its bedding, said Benjamin tenOever, a professor of microbiology at NYU Langone Health and an author of the new research. Hamsters that can smell will find the cereal in seconds.)

The virus did not invade neurons, the researchers learned, only the cells that play supporting roles in the olfactory system. But that was enough to alter the function of the nearby neurons, leading to a loss of smell.

The immune response altered the architecture of genes in the neurons, disrupting production of odor receptors, said Marianna Zazhytska, a postdoctoral fellow at the Zuckerman Institute and one of the paper's first authors, along with a graduate student, Albana Kodra.

"It is not the virus itself causing all this reorganization — it's the systemic inflammatory response," Dr. Zazhytska said. "The nerve cells are not hosting the virus, but they are not doing what they did before."

The ability of the olfactory receptors to send and receive messages is disrupted. But the neurons don't die, and so the system can recover after the illness resolves.

Earlier work at the Zuckerman Institute showed that neurons that detect smells have complex genomic organizational structures that are essential to the creation of odor receptors, and the receptor genes communicate among themselves very intensively, said Stavros Lomvardas, one of the paper's corresponding authors.

"We saw early on that upon infection, the genomic organization of these neurons changes completely — they're unrecognizable compared to how they normally are," Dr. Lomvardas said.

"There is a signal released from the infected cells that is received by the neurons that normally detect odors, and tells them to reorganize and stop expression of olfactory receptor genes," he said.

He suggested this may represent an evolutionary adaptation that offers a form of antiviral resistance and whose main purpose may be to prevent the virus from entering the brain. "That was a relief for us," he said. "That was one piece of good news."

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HEADLINE	03/02 Putin nuclear threat: new escalation policy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/2/putin-nuclear-threat-part-new-escalation-policy/
GIST	Russian President Vladimir Putin's veiled threats to use his nuclear arsenal if the West comes to Ukraine's aid in the current fighting highlight a new military doctrine called "escalate to deescalate," which calls on the military to resort to nuclear weapons more rapidly in conflicts.

U.S. officials have expressed concern that the doctrine opens a pathway for using “low-yield” nuclear strikes in conflicts when a nation’s conventional forces are stymied, as appears to be taking place for Russia just over one week into its military operation in Ukraine.

Adm. Charles Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, said he is concerned about the Russian nuclear escalate-to-deescalate policy.

“Actually, it may be thought of more as ‘escalate to win,’” Adm. Richard said during a Senate hearing in April.

The doctrine, combined with Russia’s large arsenal of nonstrategic warheads, prompted the Trump administration to convert some U.S. missiles into low-yield nuclear strike weapons, including the W76-2 warhead deployed on submarine-launched ballistic missiles in 2020.

The Biden administration is conducting a nuclear posture review, and anti-nuclear advocates are said to be arguing in favor of giving up the smaller nuclear arms. Still, analysts say, Mr. Putin’s threats announced Sunday could alter the debate as the U.S. and NATO allies rush to supply Kyiv.

Russia has stockpiled an estimated 2,000 or more tactical nuclear weapons that are not covered by arms treaties. By contrast, the United States has several hundred low-yield arms.

Russia’s tactical nuclear warheads can be fired from short-range Iskander ballistic missiles and from the SSC-8, a ground-launched cruise missile built and deployed in violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty that led President Trump to scuttle the pact.

The road-mobile SSC-8 has a range of more than 1,500 miles and can strike targets throughout Europe from bases in Russia. The Iskander, also road-mobile with a range of 310 miles, has been deployed in Russia’s Kaliningrad enclave between Lithuania and Poland.

It is not clear how Russia would conduct tactical nuclear strikes. Tactical nuclear attacks most likely would involve strikes on targets in regions of Ukraine that are most resistant to the Russian military advance.

Any nuclear strike on a NATO country would trigger massive commensurate retaliatory nuclear attacks on Russia and a major nuclear conflagration, but Ukraine is not a member of the alliance and Mr. Biden has repeatedly said U.S. and NATO troops won’t join the fight.

The Russian leader made the saber-rattling nuclear threat during a speech announcing military operations against Ukraine last week. Any nation interfering with or threatening Russia and its people during the fighting will face a response with “consequences you have never seen,” he said.

“We are ready for any turn of events. All necessary decisions in this regard have been made. I hope that I will be heard,” Mr. Putin said Feb. 24 in remarks widely interpreted as a veiled threat of nuclear retaliation.

Three days later, Mr. Putin publicly ordered Russian nuclear forces on a higher “special” state of alert. The Russian Defense Ministry said Monday that nuclear missile forces and fleets in the north and Pacific had been placed on enhanced combat readiness, Interfax reported. Russian nuclear missile submarines also conducted exercises in the Barents Sea, and mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles conducted maneuvers in Siberia, The Associated Press reported.

A senior Pentagon official said Tuesday that intelligence agencies were closely monitoring Moscow’s nuclear forces for signs of increased alert but added, “We’ve seen nothing at this time that would give us any less comfort or confidence in our own strategic deterrence posture.”

The White House and NATO officials have said they are not raising their nuclear alert status in response to Mr. Putin's order, a sign that they think Mr. Putin may not be committed to acting on his words.

Rhetoric or real?

Hans M. Kristensen, a nuclear weapons expert with the Federation of American Scientists, said Mr. Putin's threat appears mainly rhetorical.

"At this stage, it doesn't seem to be more than words," he said. "As far as I've heard, U.S. hasn't seen any significant changes on the ground."

Other analysts disagree.

Mark Schneider, a former Pentagon nuclear policy official, said nuclear attacks in Ukraine are unlikely because Russia has overwhelming conventional military power. The Ukrainian military and reserve, militia and paramilitary forces "do not present lucrative nuclear targets as massed forces military formations," he said.

However, nuclear attacks on Europe and ultimately the United States are risks if the conflict spins out of control and Russia finds itself in direct battle with NATO forces.

Russia announced the nuclear escalation policy in 2003 and demonstrated the use of tactical nuclear arms in exercises last month. In the exercises, the Russian military practiced using several advanced nonstrategic nuclear missile systems, including two types of hypersonic weapons that conducted practice strikes on Europe, Mr. Schneider said.

Unlike overall strategic doctrine, Russia's plans for limited nuclear strikes are contained in secret policy documents, but U.S. military commanders have openly discussed the dangerous implications of the shift for years.

Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in 2017 that Russia is not only "the only country that I know of that has this concept of 'escalate to terminate' or 'escalate to deescalate,' but they do have that built into their operational concept."

"We've seen them exercise that idea, and it's really kind of a dangerous idea," Gen. Stewart said.

Mr. Schneider said Mr. Putin issued a decree to the Russian navy to embrace "escalate to deescalate" in naval warfare.

"While I doubt Putin will employ nuclear weapons this time, the Biden administration's weak response to Russian aggression is increasing the chance it will happen," Mr. Schneider said.

With the United States and other Western nuclear powers refraining from raising their alert levels in response to his threats, Mr. Putin could calculate that he is operating from a position of strength, increasing the likelihood that the crisis will escalate and allow him to make greater demands for Western concessions, Mr. Schneider said.

Fiona Hill, a Russia expert who served in the Trump White House, said Mr. Putin's threat and raising of the nuclear forces alert status made "very clear that [the nuclear option] is on the table."

"The thing about Putin is, if he has an instrument, he wants to use it. Why have it if you can't?" Ms. Hill told Politico. "So if anybody thinks that Putin wouldn't use something that he's got that is unusual and cruel, think again. Every time you think, 'No, he wouldn't, would he?' Well, yes, he would. And he wants us to know that, of course."

A report by the National Institute for Public Policy said the escalation policy reflects Mr. Putin's view that nuclear arms are essential to restoring Russian power after the breakup of the Soviet Union. To that end, Moscow has built several types of new strategic weapons, including a nuclear-powered cruise missile, hypersonic strike vehicles and an underwater drone with a massive nuclear warhead.

"Should deterrence fail, Russia envisions the potential first use of nuclear weapons to demonstrate resolve and escalate a conflict much higher than an adversary would be willing to accept, thereby terminating the conflict," the report said.

In 2016, Army Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, then NATO commander, told Congress: "Russian doctrine states that tactical nuclear weapons may be used in a conventional response scenario. This is alarming, and it underscores why our country's nuclear forces and NATO's continue to be a vital component of our deterrence."

Three years later, the general told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Russian nonstrategic warhead stockpile bolstered Moscow's mistaken belief in the use of limited nuclear strikes. The strikes would "provide Russia a coercive advantage in crises and at lower levels of conflict," Gen. Scaparrotti said.

The 2018 Nuclear Posture Review called for bolstering U.S. nuclear forces with low-yield weapons as a means of closing what the military calls a gap on the escalation "ladder" of conflict. Low-yield arms are aimed at reinforcing deterrence against Russia's tactical nuclear doctrine, Gen. Scaparrotti said.

Adm. Richard, the Strategic Command leader, said Russia's pursuit of nonstrategic nuclear missiles and warheads is evidence that Moscow plans to use these weapons in a conflict it is losing.

The deployment of the low-yield U.S. missile "successfully improved deterrence against that very strategy," he said.

Under the Biden administration, the discussion of the escalate-to-deescalate debate has been muted.

Arms control advocates within the administration have argued that Russia's destabilizing escalation policy is not part of its formal military doctrine.

Russia issued a vague nuclear deterrence statement in 2020 saying nuclear arms have two roles: to prevent the escalation of hostilities and to allow for the termination of the conflict on conditions acceptable to Russia and its allies.

Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the statement does not fully clarify whether escalate-to-deescalate is official doctrine. As for specific conditions on the use of nuclear weapons, the Russian statement includes language that says nuclear arms could be used against conventional forces if the existence of the state is in danger, Mr. Trenin said.

In April, Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, commander of the European Command, repeated Gen. Scaparrotti's concern that Russia's use of nonstrategic weapons in a crisis remains a concern.

Gen. Wolters made no mention of the new doctrine and instead referred to Mr. Biden's June agreement with Mr. Putin to hold strategic stability talks where U.S. concerns could be raised. The talks were to set the stage for renewed arms control negotiations but ended up as a forum for Russian complaints about NATO. The U.S. administration called off the talks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine last week, Foreign Policy reported.

In the weeks before the Ukraine invasion, the Biden administration sought to head off Moscow by offering to negotiate limits on missile deployments and other measures. The proposal for arms talks was outlined in a leaked NATO document revealing that the United States refrained from deploying nuclear

	<p>weapons in Eastern Europe under the NATO-Russia Founding Act but could deploy them there in response to military aggression.</p> <p>“Further Russian increases to force posture or further aggression against Ukraine will force the United States and our allies to strengthen our defensive posture,” said the document, dated Dec. 17 and first published in Spain’s El Pais newspaper.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence officials revealed Russia’s construction of large numbers of underground nuclear command bunkers starting in 2016, suggesting a strategy of trying to survive a nuclear exchange. Dozens of bunkers detected in Moscow and across the country appeared similar to command and control complexes built during the Cold War under the Soviet Union.</p> <p>Moscow also built an underground subway in the late 1990s from the residence of then-President Boris Yeltsin outside Moscow to a leadership command center.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Ft Stewart troops deploy; ‘hectic, stressful’
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/2/brigade-army-3rd-infantry-division-fort-stewart-de/
GIST	<p>SAVANNAH, Ga. – About 3,800 troops based at Fort Stewart in southeast Georgia have been ordered to deploy quickly and bolster U.S. forces in Europe after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>“It’s been very hectic and stressful, but overall it’s worked out,” Army Staff Sgt. Ricora Jackson said Wednesday as she waited with dozens of fellow soldiers to board a chartered flight at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah. The soldiers are from the 1st Armored Brigade of the Army’s 3rd Infantry Division.</p> <p>In all, the Pentagon has ordered about 12,000 service members from various U.S. bases to Europe, with a couple of thousand more already stationed abroad shifting to other European countries.</p> <p>The soldiers’ mission overseas is to train alongside military units of NATO allies in a display of force aimed at deterring further aggression by Russia.</p> <p>“I’m a little nervous, but it’s OK,” said Jackson, a 22-year-old tank gunner from Pensacola, Florida.</p> <p>Asked what was making her nervous, she replied: “Just about the unknown.”</p> <p>Maj. Gen. Charles Costanza, the 3rd Infantry’s commander, said soldiers and their families were told to expect the deployment to last six months, though it could be extended or shortened depending on developments in Ukraine. “There is no intent to have any U.S. service member fight in Ukraine,” Costanza said. “And they know that.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 NATO countries pour weapons into Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/nato-weapons-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — The Dutch are sending rocket launchers for air defense. The Estonians are sending Javelin antitank missiles. The Poles and the Latvians are sending Stinger surface-to-air missiles. The Czechs are sending machine guns, sniper rifles, pistols and ammunition.</p> <p>Even formerly neutral countries like Sweden and Finland are sending weapons. And Germany, long allergic to sending weapons into conflict zones, is sending Stingers as well as other shoulder-launched rockets.</p> <p>In all, about 20 countries — most members of NATO and the European Union, but not all — are funneling arms into Ukraine to fight off Russian invaders and arm an insurgency, if the war comes to that.</p>

At the same time, NATO is moving military equipment and as many as 22,000 more troops into member states bordering Russia and Belarus, to reassure them and enhance deterrence.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought European countries together, minds concentrated by the larger threat to European security presented by the Russia of President Vladimir V. Putin.

“European security and defense has evolved more in the last six days than in the last two decades,” Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Union’s executive arm, asserted in a speech to the European Parliament on Tuesday. Brussels has moved to “Europeanize” the efforts of member states to aid Ukraine with weapons and money and put down a marker for the bloc as a significant military actor.

But whether European weaponry will continue to reach the Ukrainian battlefield in time to make a difference is far from certain. However proud Brussels is of its effort, it is a strategy that risks encouraging a wider war and possible retaliation from Mr. Putin. The rush of lethal military aid into Ukraine from Poland, a member of NATO, aims, after all, to kill Russian soldiers.

Mr. Putin already sees NATO as committed to threaten or even destroy Russia through its support for Ukraine, as he has repeated in his recent speeches, even as he has raised the nuclear alert of his own forces to warn Europe and the United States of the risks of interference.

World wars have started over smaller conflicts, and the proximity of the war to NATO allies carries the danger that it could draw in other parties in unexpected ways.

Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO secretary-general, hit his constant themes again on Tuesday as he visited a Polish air base. “Putin’s war affects us all and NATO allies will always stand together to defend and protect each other,” he said. “Our commitment to Article 5, our collective defense clause, is ironclad.”

“There must be no space for miscalculation or misunderstanding,” Mr. Stoltenberg said last week. “We will do what it takes to defend every inch of NATO territory.”

But for now the fight is in Ukraine, and while NATO and the European Union have made it clear that their soldiers would not fight Russia there, they are actively engaged in helping the Ukrainians to defend themselves.

Western weaponry has been entering Ukraine in relatively large but undisclosed amounts for the last several days. If it can be deployed quickly, it will have impact.

Speed is of the essence as the Russian invasion of Ukraine proceeds and while Ukraine’s border with Poland remains open. Russian troops are trying to surround cities and cut off the bulk of the Ukrainian army east of the Dnieper River, which would make resupply much more difficult.

While 21 of the 27 European Union countries are also members of NATO, the effort to move equipment and weapons rapidly into Ukraine from Poland is being carried out by individual countries and is not formally either a NATO or E.U. operation.

The French say that the E.U.’s military staff is trying to coordinate the push. Britain and the United States are doing the same, setting up something called, deliberately blandly and neutrally, the International Donors Coordination Center. It is doubtful that Mr. Putin will be fooled by the name.

In fact, even if no NATO soldier ever crosses into Ukraine, and even if convoys of matériel are driven to the border by nonuniformed personnel or contractors in plain trucks, the European arms supplies are likely to be seen in Moscow as a not-so-disguised intervention by NATO.

Supplying Ukraine to allow the resistance to bloody Russia’s nose is a good idea, “but the more it ramps up you wonder how Putin will respond,” said Malcolm Chalmers, deputy director of the Royal United

Services Institute, a defense research institute. “What happens if he attacks on the other side of the border? We pursue terrorists across borders, why not him?”

From the Russian point of view, NATO military veterans who are now contractors helping the Ukrainians and training them, Mr. Chalmers said, “might be viewed by Moscow as the Western equivalent of ‘little green men,’” the Russian soldiers without identifying insignia who first moved in to annex Crimea.

Then there is always the possibility of Russian aircraft straying into NATO airspace as they try to interdict convoys or chase Ukrainian planes. Something similar happened the only time a NATO country shot down a Russian Su-24 fighter jet, near the Turkish-Syrian border in 2015.

More supplies of ground-to-air missiles like Stingers and antitank weapons like the Javelin are crucial, as is secure communications equipment, so the Ukrainian government can continue to be in contact with its military and its people if the Russians take down the internet, said Douglas Lute, a former lieutenant-general and American ambassador to NATO.

“On NATO territory, we should be the Pakistan,” he said, stockpiling matériel in Poland and organizing supply lines to the Ukrainians as Pakistan supplied the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The European fund being used to buy lethal arms is called the European Peace Facility.

The fund is two years old and is intended, at least, to prevent conflict and strengthen international security. It has a financial ceiling of 5.7 billion euros — about \$6.4 billion — for the seven-year budget of 2021 to 2027. If Ukraine needs more money, the E.U. official said, it can be provided.

According to NATO, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Britain and the United States have already sent or are approving significant deliveries of military equipment to Ukraine, as well as millions of dollars, while other member states are providing humanitarian aid and welcoming refugees.

On Feb. 25, the day after Russia attacked Ukraine, the White House approved a \$350 million package of weapons and equipment, including Javelins and Stingers. Pentagon officials said shipments began flowing within days from military stockpiles in Germany to Poland and Romania, from where the matériel has been shipped overland through western Ukraine.

Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, promised Ukraine to provide tens of thousands of shells and artillery ammunition, antiaircraft missiles, light mortars, reconnaissance drones and other reconnaissance weapons. Poland, Hungary and Moldova are also welcoming thousands of Ukrainians fleeing the war.

Sweden, not a member of NATO, announced that it would send Ukraine 5,000 antitank weapons, 5,000 helmets, 5,000 items of body armor and 135,000 field rations, plus about \$52 million for the Ukrainian military. Finland, similarly, has said it will deliver 2,500 assault rifles and 150,000 rounds of ammunition for them, 1,500 antitank weapons and 70,000 combat rations.

But NATO has also moved to sharply reinforce its deterrence in member states on its eastern flank, to ensure that Russia does not test NATO’s commitment to collective defense.

The United States alone has deployed 15,000 extra troops to Europe — 5,000 to Poland, 1,000 to Romania and 1,000 to the Baltic States — while committing another 12,000 troops, if necessary, to NATO’s Response Force, being used in collective defense for the first time.

Washington has also deployed more fighter jets and attack helicopters to Romania, Poland and the Baltic States.

In other examples of the rapid NATO effort to beef up its eastern borders, France sent its first tranche of troops to Romania on Monday, to lead a new NATO battalion there, and provided Rafale fighter jets to Poland.

Germany, which already is lead nation of a NATO battalion in Lithuania, has sent another 350 troops and howitzers there, six fighter jets to Romania, some troops to Slovakia and two more ships to NATO's maritime patrols. Berlin also said it would send a Patriot missile battery and 300 troops to operate it to NATO's eastern flank, but did not specify where.

Britain, the lead nation of the NATO battalion in Estonia, has sent another 850 soldiers and more Challenger tanks there, plus 350 more troops to Poland. It has also put another 1,000 on standby to help with refugees, and sent another four fighter jets to Cyprus, while sending two ships to the eastern Mediterranean.

Canada has sent some 1,200 soldiers, artillery and electronic warfare units to Latvia, as well as another frigate and reconnaissance aircraft, while putting 3,400 troops on standby for the Response Force.

Italy sent eight fighter jets to Romania and put 3,400 troops on standby, while the Dutch have sent 100 troops to Lithuania and 125 to Romania, and assigned eight fighter jets to NATO duties.

Denmark is sending a frigate to the Baltic Sea and will send 200 soldiers and deploy four fighter jets to Lithuania and some to Poland to support of NATO's air-policing mission, while Spain has sent four fighter jets to Bulgaria and ships for maritime patrols.

This is hardly a complete listing, but gives an indication of the seriousness with which NATO is taking the threat of further Russian aggression or of a spillover of the war into NATO territory.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Eastern Europe countries fear catastrophe
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/ukraine-russia-eastern-europe.html
GIST	<p>PODBORSKO, Poland — Scattered around the forest in Poland like archaeological ruins, the crumbling concrete bunkers for decades stored Soviet nuclear warheads. Today, they store only memories — deeply painful for Poland, joyous for the Kremlin — of the vanished empire that President Vladimir V. Putin wants to rebuild, starting with his war in Ukraine.</p> <p>“Nobody here trusted the Russians before and we certainly don’t trust them now,” said Mieczyslaw Zuk, a former Polish soldier who oversees the once top-secret nuclear site. The bunkers were abandoned by the Soviet military in 1990 as Moscow’s hegemony over East and Central Europe unraveled in what President Putin has described as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”</p> <p>Now Eastern European countries fear a catastrophe of their own could be in the making, as Mr. Putin seeks to turn back the clock and reclaim Russia’s lost sphere of influence, perilously close to their frontiers. Even leaders in the region who have long supported Mr. Putin are sounding the alarm.</p> <p>Warnings about Moscow’s intentions, often dismissed until last Thursday’s invasion of Ukraine as “Russophobia” by those without experience of living in proximity to Russia, are now widely accepted as prescient. And while there has been debate about whether efforts to expand NATO into the former Soviet bloc were a provocation to Mr. Putin, his assault on Ukraine has left countries that joined the American-led military alliance convinced they made the right decision.</p> <p>A Russian attack on Poland or other former members of the defunct Warsaw Pact that now belong to NATO is still highly unlikely but Mr. Putin has “made the unthinkable possible,” warned Gabrielius Landsbergis, the foreign minister of Lithuania, Poland’s neighbor to the north.</p>

“We live in a new reality. If Putin is not stopped he will go further,” Mr. Landsbergis said in an interview. His country, bordering both Russia and its ally Belarus, has declared a state of emergency.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of Poland gave his own warning of perhaps worse to come. “We should be under no illusions: this could be just the beginning,” he wrote in the Financial Times. “Tomorrow Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, as well as Poland, could be next in line.”

Fear that Mr. Putin is capable of just about anything, even using nuclear weapons, is just “common sense,” said Toomas Ilves, a former president of Estonia.

Mr. Ilves announced this week on Twitter that he was “accepting apologies” for all the “patronizing nonsense from Western Europeans” who complained that “we Estonians were paranoid about Russian behavior.”

In a telephone interview, Mr. Ilves said he had not received any apologies yet but was gratified to see Russia’s “shills and useful idiots getting their comeuppance.”

Western Europeans who once scoffed at his dark view of Russia, he added, “have suddenly become East Europeans” in their fearful attitudes. “This past week marks the end of a 30-year-long error that we can all come together and sing kumbaya.”

Memories of Soviet hegemony over what is now NATO’s eastern flank — imposed after the Red Army liberated the region from Nazi occupation at the end of World War II — vary from country to country depending on history, geography and convoluted domestic political struggles.

For Poland, a nation repeatedly invaded by Russia over the centuries, they are of humiliation and oppression. Baltic states, extinguished as independent nations by Stalin in 1940 and dragooned at gunpoint into the Soviet Union, feel much the same way.

Others have fonder recollections, particularly Bulgaria, where pro-Russian sentiment has long run deep, at least until last week, and Serbia, which has for centuries seen Russia as its protector.

Mr. Putin’s war to bring Ukraine to heel, however, has united the region in alarm, with even Serbia voicing dismay. On Monday, Bulgaria’s prime minister fired his defense minister, who caused outrage by suggesting that the conflict in Ukraine should not be called a war but “a special military operation,” the Kremlin’s euphemism for its invasion.

Only Milorad Dodik, the belligerent, pro-Kremlin leader of Bosnia’s ethnic Serbian enclave, Republika Srpska, has shown any sympathy for Mr. Putin’s war, stating that Russia’s reasons for its invasion “were received with understanding.”

Outrage over Russian aggression, even in countries historically sympathetic to Moscow, has derailed years of work by Russian diplomats and intelligence operatives to cultivate allies like Ataka, an ultranationalist political party in Bulgaria that is so close to Russia that it once launched its election campaign in Moscow.

Even Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, who usually delights in defying fellow European leaders and stood with Mr. Putin last month in the Kremlin, has now endorsed a raft of sanctions imposed on Russia by the European bloc. He is still blocking transport of weapons into Ukraine across Hungary’s border but has curbed his previously gushing enthusiasm for Mr. Putin.

So, too, has Miloš Zeman, the previously Kremlin-friendly president of the Czech Republic. “I admit I was wrong,” Mr. Zeman said this week.

In Poland, traditionally one of the most anti-Russian countries in the region, the populist governing party, Law and Justice, has gone almost overnight from aligning itself with Moscow in its hostility to L.G.B.T.Q. rights and the defense of traditional values to become one of Mr. Putin’s most robust critics, offering its

territory for the delivery of weapons into Ukraine and taking in more than 450,000 Ukrainians who have fled the war.

Gas stations and A.T.M.s in southeastern Poland along the border with Ukraine have been besieged in recent days by people worried that they might need to get out fast. That possibility hit home on Monday evening when missiles slammed into a Ukrainian village just a few miles from the frontier, rattling windows in nearby houses on the Polish side.

Just two weeks before Russian troops poured into Ukraine, Poland's prime minister, Mr. Morawiecki, joined Mr. Orban and Marine Le Pen, the far-right French presidential candidate who has frequently spoken up for Russia, at a meeting in Madrid focused on attacking the European Union and its liberal attitudes on immigration.

In recent days, however, Mr. Morawiecki has dropped the hostility to the European bloc to focus instead on opposing the Kremlin. He has lobbied for tough sanctions on Russia, traveling to Berlin to personally "shake Germany's conscience" and nudge it toward a dramatic U-turn in its policy toward Russia. On a recent visit to Warsaw, Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III hailed Poland as "one of our most stalwart allies."

On Friday, Poland hosted a summit meeting with nine regional leaders to rally opposition to Russia's invasion and discuss ways to help Ukraine. "We have woken up to a completely new reality," the Polish president, Andrzej Duda, told the gathering, lamenting that it had taken a Russian invasion to interrupt "the peaceful sleep of wealthy Europeans."

A nation of Slavs like Ukraine, Poland has long been viewed as a wayward family member by more messianic-minded Russian nationalists, whose views Mr. Putin channeled last week in his justification for the war. Russia's foreign minister recently sneered at Poland and other new NATO members as "territories orphaned" by the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union.

To demonstrate that Poland has no desire to rejoin what Moscow imagines as its happy, obedient but sadly divided family, the mayor of Warsaw announced on Tuesday that refugees from Ukraine would be housed in apartment blocks built during the Cold War to house Soviet diplomats and left abandoned since because of legal disputes over ownership.

Few people expect Russia to try and bring Poles back into a Moscow-dominated Slavic "family" by force, as it is now trying to do with Ukrainians. Doing that, said Tomasz Smura, director of research at the Casimir Pulaski Foundation, a research group in Warsaw, "would mean that Putin has gone totally mad."

At the former Soviet warhead bunker in Podborsko, northwestern Poland, Mr. Zuk said he never really expected the Russians to try to retake their lost, Soviet-era military outposts. But he still wondered why, just before pulling out of Podborsko with its nuclear weapons, the Soviet military drew up a maintenance schedule for cranes used to lift warheads and other equipment at the facility stretching years into the future.

"It seems they did not think they were leaving forever," Mr. Zuk said, standing in a cavernous underground hall once crammed with warheads and long off limits to all but Soviet officers. In its attitude toward Poland, he added, Russia has always acted "like a master toward a servant," a relationship that it is now trying to impose on Ukraine. "I worry that Putin may want to get hold of Poland and the Baltic states, too," he said.

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HEADLINE	03/02 CDC drops universal contact tracing
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/02/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#cdc-contact-tracing
GIST	Almost two years after the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called for 100,000 contact tracers to contain the coronavirus, the C.D.C. said this week that it no longer recommends universal

case investigation and contact tracing. Instead it encourages health departments to focus those practices on high-risk settings.

The turning point comes as the national outlook continues to improve rapidly, with [new cases](#), [hospitalizations and deaths](#) all continuing to fall even as [the path out of the pandemic remains complicated](#). It also reflects the reality that contact-tracing programs in about half of U.S. states have been eliminated.

Britain [ended](#) contact tracing last week, while Denmark and Finland are among other nations that have scaled back the use of contact tracers. New York City [announced](#) on Tuesday that it was ending its main contact-tracing program in late April and moving toward treating the coronavirus as another manageable virus.

“This is a big change,” Crystal Watson, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, said in an interview on Tuesday. “It does reflect what’s already happening in states and localities, particularly with Omicron. There was no way contact tracing could keep up with that. Many of the cases are not being reported, so there’s no way of knowing the incidence.”

The original goal of contact tracing in the United States was to reach people who have spent more than 15 minutes within six feet of an infected person and ask them to quarantine at home voluntarily for two weeks even if they test negative. The aim was to reduce transmission while Americans who tested positive monitored themselves for symptoms during their isolation. Case investigation is used to identify and understand cases, clusters and outbreaks that require health department intervention.

But from the start of the pandemic, states and cities struggled to detect the prevalence of the virus because of spotty and sometimes rationed diagnostic testing and long delays in getting results.

Now the C.D.C. is pushing health departments to focus solely on high-risk settings, like long-term care facilities, jails and prisons, and shelters. Many immunocompromised Americans, though, [feel left behind by the lifting of precautions and restrictions](#) across the country.

“The updated guidance is in response to changes in the nature of the pandemic and the increasing availability of new tools to prevent transmission and mitigate illness,” Kristen Nordlund, a spokeswoman for the C.D.C., said Tuesday.

She said that the dominance of variants with very short incubation periods and rapid transmissibility combined with high levels of infection- or vaccine-induced immunity and the wide availability of vaccines for most age groups made the change possible.

Dr. Watson, who was the lead author of [a 2020 report](#) recommending that the country have 100,000 contact tracers, said that she was worried that the new guidance might lead to a dismantling of the infrastructure that was put into place to support as many as 70,000 contact tracers, the peak number the country reached during the winter surge of 2020.

“We anticipate that there will be a need for contact tracing,” she said, “so some of the investments made in rebuilding the public health work force should be used more broadly so we can call on them in the next emergency.”

More than 20 states still have statewide contact-tracing programs, according to Hemi Tewarson, the executive director of the National Academy for State Health Policy.

“I actually think that the federal government move is consistent with what states are doing,” she said in an interview on Tuesday. “They’re already concentrating contact tracing on high-risk settings.”

Ms. Tewarson said that contact tracing could not keep up with the Omicron surge, and that it was no longer as effective a tool if people are testing at home and not reporting results.

	“As a longer term plan, this is going to be more sustainable,” she said. “We’re at a different stage of the pandemic.”
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HEADLINE	03/03 All Australia opens to vaccinated travelers
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/02/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#all-of-australia-is-now-reopened-to-vaccinated-travelers
GIST	<p>After 697 days, the last of Australia’s strict pandemic-era border restrictions have been lifted as the state of Western Australia reopens itself to vaccinated travelers.</p> <p>Starting on Thursday, people arriving from other parts of Australia can enter Western Australia without quarantining if they have received three coronavirus vaccine doses and test negative for the virus upon arrival. Vaccinated international travelers need only have received two doses and a negative test result to enter without quarantining, while unvaccinated foreigners need an exemption to enter the country.</p> <p>On Thursday, arrivals at Perth Airport, in the state’s capital, were greeted with hugs and tears, many reuniting with family or loved ones for the first time in two years. State authorities expect about 5,000 domestic and international travelers to flood into the state in the first 24 hours of the reopening.</p> <p>“Tomorrow, we take a big step forward as our border controls come down,” the state’s premier, Mark McGowan, said at news conference on Wednesday. “Families can reunite without unduly risking the health of the state. It’s going to be good to see.”</p> <p>At the beginning of the pandemic, Australia slammed shut its borders, banning both international travel and movement between some states in an attempt to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Western Australia restricted travel in and out of the state in April 2020 for all but exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>As the months stretched on, the tough measures came under fire for separating Western Australians from loved ones. Criticism intensified at the end of last year when other states began to lift their domestic border restrictions and reopen to international students and some visa holders. Then on Feb. 21, Australia celebrated as it welcomed international travelers across the country — except in Western Australia.</p> <p>Mr. McGowan has defended the border closures, saying they have saved lives and allowed Western Australians to live the past two years largely without pandemic restrictions, avoiding the harsh lockdowns that states like Victoria, which includes Melbourne, went through. Western Australia, which has a population of 2.7 million, has only had 11 coronavirus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic, according to the state government.</p> <p>Western Australia had planned to start easing border restrictions in February, but the move was delayed as the Omicron variant spread along Australia’s east coast. Omicron entered the state despite the border closure, and cases are still increasing in Western Australia.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Philadelphia drops mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/02/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#philadelphia-drops-its-mask-mandate
GIST	<p>Philadelphia residents no longer need to wear masks in most indoor settings, starting immediately, the city’s health commissioner, Dr. Cheryl Bettigole, announced on Wednesday.</p> <p>With Philadelphia reporting an average of 295 new coronavirus cases per day, down from almost 4,000 during the Omicron peak, city authorities say it is safe to stop enforcing the mandate.</p>

The change in policy came as other U.S. cities and counties have rapidly relaxed their mask mandates, including [Chicago](#), [Washington, D.C.](#), [Los Angeles County](#), [New York City](#) and [Boston](#).

Last month, [Philadelphia](#) announced a new tiered Covid response system, which ties restrictions to specific benchmarks for new daily cases, hospitalizations, test positivity rates and the rate at which cases are rising. The metrics have improved enough that [Philadelphia](#) can move to the “all clear” level, where vaccines and masks are no longer required in most indoor spaces, the Health Department [said](#).

The mask mandate remains in place in health care settings and on public transit, and businesses and other institutions are allowed to require masks or proof of vaccination if they choose to do so.

Masks will no longer be required in Philadelphia schools [starting March 9](#), if the situation continues to improve.

“Philadelphia is unique in that we are the poorest big city in the country, making us more vulnerable to Covid-19 than many other places,” Dr. Bettigole said. She added that Philadelphians had shown a commitment to each other during the pandemic, “perhaps best demonstrated by our willingness to wear masks for the past six months to help decrease transmission to those that remain at risk.”

Almost 70 percent of Philadelphians are fully vaccinated, [according to a New York Times database](#), but the number of people receiving their [first doses](#) has stalled, as they have nationally.

Other places in the United States that announced changes to mask policies this week:

- Children were allowed to shed their masks on Wednesday in public schools across [New York State](#) where there were no local mandates, after Gov. Kathy Hochul announced on Sunday that she was rolling back the [statewide school mask mandate](#). Children in some [child care centers](#) can now also go maskless.
- Maine’s state government said on Wednesday that it would lift its statewide mask requirement for schools on March 9, after which school districts will be responsible for setting mask policies.
- Education officials in Chicago, one of the largest U.S. public school systems, say they might soon end the city’s mandate in schools.
- [Los Angeles County](#) is poised to lift its indoor mask requirement for unvaccinated residents on March 4.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Pandemic hit women in Americas hard
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/02/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#the-who-says-the-pandemic-has-hit-women-in-the-americas-hard-especially-pregnant-women
GIST	<p>Women, and particularly pregnant women, have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic in the Americas, and countries in the region need to give women’s health higher priority, World Health Organization officials said on Wednesday.</p> <p>For example, 72 percent of the Covid-19 cases among health professionals in the region have been women, officials said.</p> <p>And while women in general are less likely than men to develop severe disease, some studies found that migrant women and women of African or Indigenous descent in the region are often at greater risk because of “the overlap of gender and social factors,” Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, the director of the Pan American Health Organization, a division of the W.H.O., said at a news conference.</p> <p>She said the pandemic has had a “staggering impact” on maternal deaths, by reducing prenatal health services and cutting off access to care. “Covid-19 morbidity and mortality rates among pregnant women are significantly higher in the Americas, as compared to other W.H.O. regions,” Dr. Etienne said.</p>

	<p>Since the start of the pandemic, more than 365,000 coronavirus cases have been reported among pregnant women in the region, and more than 3,000 of those women died, according to P.A.H.O. data.</p> <p>Though most countries in the Americas have made access to vaccines for pregnant women a priority, many pregnant women have been hesitant to receive a dose.</p> <p>As the Omicron surge recedes, Dr. Etienne said, countries across the region need to resume providing health services that were interrupted during the height of the pandemic.</p> <p>“Routine checkups, family planning services and pregnancy-related care are lifesaving services that should remain open now, more than ever,” Dr. Etienne said. “Post-rape care has been particularly disrupted by the pandemic. It is unacceptable that women who have been raped do not get the care and support they need.”</p> <p>Reports of new coronavirus cases and deaths are declining in most of the Western Hemisphere, but there are exceptions. Ten countries in the region reported more deaths last week than the week before, officials said, and Central America as a whole reported an increase in deaths of nearly 16 percent.</p> <p>“The number of weekly deaths remains elevated in some countries of the Caribbean, like Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, when you analyze these numbers in the context of the entire pandemic timeline,” said Sylvain Aldighieri, P.A.H.O.’s incident manager for Covid-19. P.A.H.O. officials have warned that Caribbean nations remained particularly vulnerable to the virus.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 New Zealand faces Covid reckoning
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/australia/new-zealand-covid-omicron.html
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand — For much of the past two years, Covid-19 was a phantom presence in New Zealand, a plague experienced mostly through news reports from faraway lands.</p> <p>Now, suddenly, it has become a highly personal threat.</p> <p>New Zealand is being walloped by a major outbreak of the Omicron variant, with the virus spreading at what may be the fastest rate in the world. On Thursday, the country reported 23,194 new cases, a once unthinkable number in a small island nation of about five million people where the record daily case count before the current wave was in the low hundreds.</p> <p>The explosion in cases has come as the government, under political pressure, loosened its strict regulations meant to prevent the spread of the virus, and as the highly transmissible Omicron reduced the effectiveness of the controls that remained.</p> <p>That has filled many New Zealanders with anxiety as they learn to live with the pandemic-related risk that the rest of the world has grappled with since early 2020.</p> <p>“For the vast majority of the pandemic, most New Zealanders didn’t know anyone who had Covid-19. That’s changing massively now,” said Siouxsie Wiles, a microbiologist at the University of Auckland. “This is the first time most New Zealanders are dealing with Covid-19 in their own homes.”</p> <p>While the ever-growing case numbers may be unsettling, New Zealand was perhaps as well positioned as it could have been for its deferred reckoning with the virus.</p> <p>Earlier in the pandemic, before the population was widely vaccinated, the country kept infections and deaths very low through a stringent quarantine system for incoming travelers, lockdowns during outbreaks and significant isolation periods for those who tested positive or were close contacts.</p>

Caseloads often stood at zero, and life for long periods resembled a time before the pandemic. Even after New Zealand began to shift away from a “Covid zero” strategy following the emergence of the Delta variant, case numbers remained relatively small.

By the time of the arrival of the Omicron variant — which is more contagious but often produces milder symptoms — the country was well protected. Ninety-five percent of New Zealanders over age 12 have been vaccinated, and 57 percent have had a booster shot.

With this combination of strict measures and widespread inoculation, the country has reported just 56 virus deaths throughout the pandemic — by far the lowest rate of any major democracy.

But New Zealand’s initial caution toward the virus became politically untenable this year as citizens living overseas protested limits on their return and business advocates called for fewer restrictions.

In response, the government weakened its pandemic controls. Last week, it removed many self-isolation requirements, and on Monday it announced that vaccinated New Zealanders could freely enter the country without isolating or quarantining.

Now, with the virus spreading rapidly, the country has been forced to undergo a “big psychological shift,” said Michael Baker, an epidemiologist at the University of Otago in Dunedin.

While the approach to managing the virus was once one of “collective protection,” Dr. Baker said, it is now one of “much more individual and family responsibility.”

The government has tried to prepare the public for this shift by warning that New Zealanders’ experience of the virus would change. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern noted last week that “very soon we will all know people who have Covid-19 or we will potentially get it ourselves.”

Modelers estimate that each Omicron-positive New Zealander is infecting an average of 4.64 other people — the highest rate among 180 countries analyzed. Experts believe that half the country could be infected within three months.

“We’re finally experiencing the difficult side of exponential growth,” said Dr. Wiles, the University of Auckland microbiologist. “I feel quite nervous about the rest of the year.”

Jin Russell, a community and developmental pediatrician at the University of Auckland, said that some vaccinated New Zealanders just wanted to get on with their lives.

But for families with members who are at heightened risk from the virus, it’s an unnerving time. “And then there are other people who continue to mourn the elimination strategy and are living quite restricted lives as they try to avoid or delay catching the virus,” Dr. Russell said.

Approximately 40 percent of New Zealanders are now working from home, according to Brad Olsen, a senior economist at Infometrics, a consultancy in Wellington. On Tuesday, lawmakers participated remotely in parliamentary debates for the first time.

Major outbreaks have also occurred in other countries, like Australia, that loosened strict pandemic measures. Australia’s spike, however, occurred during the Southern Hemisphere summer, which Dr. Baker said significantly slowed the virus’s spread.

New Zealand’s outbreak, by contrast, has come as workplaces settled into the business year and students headed back to school and college. Ashley Bloomfield, New Zealand’s director-general of health, has called it a “nationwide superspreader event.”

	<p>At the University of Otago, for example, students hosted a series of large parties at which hundreds of people were exposed to an Omicron-positive person. The police intervened to prevent another party at which Covid-positive students intended to invite dozens of friends who were also infected.</p> <p>“Police advised them that this is a stupid idea,” Anthony Bond, a senior police sergeant, said at the time.</p> <p>While these were a minority of students, over the weeks since, the virus has spread rapidly in large apartments with multiple people, according to the president of the local students association, Melissa Lama.</p> <p>By Tuesday, there were over 3,200 active cases of Covid-19 in Dunedin, with many hundreds more people self-isolating as household contacts. Students are anxious about the virus’s spread and frustrated with the individual pressure they feel about managing it, Ms. Lama said.</p> <p>Elsewhere in the country, anger over the government’s Covid-19 response produced a different kind of superspreader event. In Wellington, the capital, hundreds of demonstrators opposed to vaccine mandates occupied the grounds surrounding Parliament in an occasionally violent protest that lasted for over three weeks.</p> <p>After serious clashes between the police and demonstrators, multiple officers began reporting Covid-19 infections. Partly because of the health risk, officers battled protesters to clear the occupation on Wednesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Anxiety in Odessa as Russia advances
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/odessa-black-sea-ukraine-russia.html
GIST	<p>ODESSA, Ukraine—Sparks fly day and night at the rail yard of Odessa’s tram authority, where men in coveralls are slicing up old steel rails and welding them into barricades called “hedgehogs” to stop Russian tanks.</p> <p>Not far away, the area around the city’s elegant baroque opera house looks like a set from a World War II movie, with chest-high stacks of sandbags and troops in green uniforms. And a food market downtown popular with hipsters has been turned into a warehouse for a range of provisions — food, clothing and medicine for the troops.</p> <p>A major attack on Odessa, which as Ukraine’s biggest port city is crucial for the country’s economic survival, feels like an inevitability, officials and residents say.</p> <p>Russian naval ships have gathered just outside Ukraine’s territorial waters in the Black Sea, and Russian troops are pushing ever closer from the east. On Wednesday, the city’s mayor, Gennady Trukhanov, was inspecting a bomb shelter at an orphanage when he received a call that a Russian jet, likely having flown in from the Crimean Peninsula, had fired a rocket at a military installation just outside town.</p> <p>“Don’t be a hero,” the mayor told the caller, “there will be time for that later.”</p> <p>“I think they’re testing our anti-aircraft systems,” Mr. Trukhanov said when he hung up the phone. “He flies in, we open fire, he flies away and almost immediately they fire a rocket.”</p> <p>For the first several days of the invasion, Russia primarily concentrated its military forces on Kyiv, in the north, and Ukraine’s second-largest city, Kharkiv, in the northeast. But a concerted and in many ways more successful campaign is being waged in Ukraine’s south, along the coasts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, a small, important body of water where Russia seeks full control.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, Russian forces had captured the strategically important city of Kherson at the mouth of the Dnieper River, the first major city to come under Russian control. The fate of Mariupol on the Sea of</p>

Azov, an inland body of water that Russia and Ukraine share, also hung in the balance as Russian naval forces gathered in an apparent effort to mount an amphibious attack.

The carnage in Kherson was particularly extreme: Volunteers had been dispatched to gather up bodies, many of them unidentifiable because of tank and artillery fire, and bury them in mass graves, the city's mayor, Igor Kolykhaev, said in an interview on Wednesday.

"They've fully come into the city," Mr. Kolykhaev said, adding that he met with the Russian commander, who said he intended to put in place a military administration.

Kherson, with a population of around 300,000, is just over 120 miles from Odessa, and Russian troops have already pushed beyond it to Mykolaiv, about 45 miles to the north, Ukrainian officials said.

But it is Odessa that would be the real prize. Founded by Catherine the Great in the late 1700s, the city was a crown jewel of the Russian Empire and a critical commercial port for the Soviet Union. Though it is not as militarily significant as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has spoken wistfully about the reconstitution of imperial-era New Russia, a region along the Black Sea centered on Odessa.

Like [the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk](#), Odessa was the site of a separatist uprising [backed by Russia](#) in 2014 that sought to create an independent state. But the effort was crushed after a series of pitched street battles pitting the separatists against Ukrainian nationalists and soccer hooligans, which culminated in [the torching of a trade union building](#) on the outskirts of Odessa. At least 40 pro-Russian activists were killed.

Days before the invasion started last week, Mr. Putin issued a threat against those who started the fire, suggesting that Odessa was on his mind.

"The criminals who committed this evil act have not been punished," he said. "No one is looking for them, but we know them by name."

Mr. Trukhanov, the Odessa mayor, backed by assessments from Ukraine's military, said Russia's goal was likely to surround Odessa with land and naval forces, cutting off Ukraine's access to the Black Sea, which is the country's primary link to the global economy.

Surrounding Odessa, he said, "will put an end to cargo shipments, an end to the economy and the end of development."

He added, "But we're not talking about that often, because the priority is survival."

Odessa has undergone a profound and disturbing transformation since Russia invaded. Just over a week ago, the city was experiencing an unusual early warm snap that drove people outside, to the city's cobblestone streets and beaches. Crowds flocked to the opera house, flamboyantly renovated with polished marble and 25 pounds of gold leaf, to see a performance of Madama Butterfly.

Now the entire historic center around the opera is sealed off by sandbags, barbed wire and troops armed with automatic weapons.

"I can't believe that a week ago I was a lawyer," said Inga Kordynovska. She said she had been planning to compete in an international ballroom dancing competition, but was now coordinating the collection of food, clothing and medicine for Odessa's territorial defense troops.

"One day, I had heels and makeup; I was going to ballroom dancing," she said. "And now everything has changed."

	<p>The entrance to the Odessa Food Market has been draped with a large Red Cross banner and fortified with sandbags. Before the war, people used to eat Chinese street food and sip craft IPAs; now men in beanie hats and neck tattoos are stacking bottles of water and sorting bags of clothing.</p> <p>Though the mission is to gather supplies for the city's defenders, none of the combatants are allowed to enter the hall, said Nikolai Vikniatskyi, who owns a furniture company and is now volunteering at the site.</p> <p>"We've banned people with weapons from coming here so as not to attract other people with weapons," Mr. Vikniatskyi. "We don't want for our hipsters or our fashionable youth to be hurt. They're not military people, they don't know how to fight."</p> <p>The fight may come anyway. As if to underscore the threat, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, replaced the Odessa region's civilian governor with a colonel from Ukraine's armed forces. On Wednesday, Ukraine's Navy accused Russian forces in the Black Sea of attempting to enter Ukraine's territorial waters using civilian boats as a "human shield."</p> <p>Though Odessa has not experienced the intense shelling of other cities like Kyiv and Kharkiv, there have been sporadic rocket attacks. It was unclear if Wednesday's hostilities caused any injuries, but one person was killed on Tuesday in an attack on a military radar installation, Mr. Trukhanov, the Odessa mayor, said.</p> <p>Also on Tuesday, an explosion ripped through the small village of Dachne, north of Odessa just off the highway to Kyiv. Several houses along a potholed street were reduced to rubble, and power line poles and trees were snapped at their bases.</p> <p>A 60-year-old resident named Yuri said workers had extracted an undetonated shell from his front yard, which destroyed a brand-new Volkswagen his children had given him for his birthday. It was not clear whether the shell was fired by Russian forces or if Ukrainian troops mistakenly hit the village.</p> <p>All this has rattled the residents of Odessa. At an orphanage visited by Mr. Trukhanov on Wednesday, tiny jackets had been arranged on a table to be ready in case the children had to make a dash to the bomb shelter in the basement.</p> <p>After lunch time, a group of the youngest was tucked into their beds for nap time, while their caretaker stood over them, playing a lullaby on her phone, and silently crying.</p> <p>"God," she said, addressing the mayor, "everything is going to be OK, right?"</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Seattle tiny house villages trash frustration
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/tiny-house-villages-in-seattle-growing-source-of-frustration-for-some-neighbors
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — By most accounts, tiny house villages have made a huge difference in helping homeless people transition off the streets with Gov. Jay Inslee visiting one on Tuesday in Seattle as he pledged to build more.</p> <p>"We're trying to get \$350 million from the legislature this year," he said. "To accelerate this type of housing."</p> <p>But after all the pomp and circumstance for the new developments, the reality for Sukhdev Singh, who owns Jim's Mart next door to a tiny house village in the Othello neighborhood, is not as rosy.</p> <p>He said residents at the village are dumping trash on his property.</p>

"You know they just throw from that side. Garbage (and) metals," he said, adding that no one from the city comes to remove the garbage. "We have to do it man!"

Video obtained by KOMO News shows some of the conditions inside the Othello location where dozens of bicycles and an assortment of items piled up in common areas.

And it isn't any better at the tiny house village in the Georgetown neighborhood.

Justin Giese lives there and said it even difficult for him.

"There's a lot of people who like to collect," he said. "Sometimes it's hard to get around because of this stuff."

Sharon Lee, executive director of the Low Income Housing Institute, which manages 10 tiny house villages in Seattle, said: "We have hoarders."

KOMO News asked Lee about the trash concerns raised by Singh and the allegations of mismanagement. But she abruptly stopped the interview.

"I want to speak to your manager and your supervisor because I don't appreciate this," she said.

David Preston, runs the Facebook page called Safe Seattle, and once sued Lee's group, alleging that the tiny house villages negatively impact neighborhoods in which they're located. He does not want to see more erected in the city.

"The camps look great for about the first six months when the paint is new," he said. "Then things start to look pretty trashy."

After walking away from an interview with KOMO News, Lee eventually called us back and said she is now working on restoring the relationship with Singh.

"We thought we were pretty cool with him," she said. "But if there is someone doing illegal dumping, then we want to help out."

The housing institute agency declined to allow KOMO News to enter the Georgetown and Othello locations, but Lee said she is working with staff to help clean up the common areas and enforce a code of conduct.

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HEADLINE	03/02 For many, Seattle area house not affordable
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/can-you-afford-to-buy-a-house-in-the-seattle-area-for-many-the-answer-is-no
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Home purchase costs in the Seattle area have skyrocketed year-over-year along with monthly mortgage payments that are way up, too.</p> <p>According to the online real estate firm Zillow, nationwide home prices have appreciated by 20 percent from this time last year and many local home buyers are experiencing sticker shock not once, but twice.</p> <p>On a quiet street in Wallingford, an open house for brokers on Wednesday lured married couple Ruby and Abhijat to come out and take a sneak peek.</p> <p>The couple said they know competition for affordable homes in Seattle is fierce because of a very tight residential real estate inventory. The couple says they have learned the hard way that timing can be everything.</p>

"We get really excited (and) we go to the house (and) we wait two or three days," Ruby said while they mull the purchase only to find out, "And it's sold!"

The couple is looking to buy a two-bedroom, two-bath house.

The two-story home on Latona Avenue in Seattle was listed at nearly \$1 million.

"We apply all sorts of the filters on the website and all we end up with maybe is one house," Abhijit said. "It comes down to one or two houses at any point in time and then bam! They're also gone."

A spot check Wednesday on Zillow.com for single-family homes available for sale at or below \$500,000 turned up just seven listings in Seattle with three of those being house boats.

As of earlier today the city of Everett had just five homes for sale at that price, and in Bellevue, there were no single-family homes for sale below \$500,000.

"The housing market is bonkers, gob smacking and unbelievable," said Jeff Tucker, a senior economist at Zillow, adding that home prices have appreciated in the Seattle region by 20 percent over a year ago, and nearly 20 percent nationwide. "That just broke the 'Y' axis on all our charts. We never thought we'd see price appreciation like we have in the last year."

Add to that are interest rates that have risen as high as 4 percent.

Zucker said add in those increased monthly mortgage costs and that 20 percent increase from year to year jumps to a whopping 35 percent.

"That's taking something people who could barely manage and making it out of reach," Tucker said.

"I had some clients write an offer on a home in Edmonds and that was 26 offers," said Windermere realtor Michelle Markwood.

Markwood said 26 offers is the exception, not the rule but says bottom line buyers need a reset if they want to understand what's happening. She insists the current real estate market is unlike any other in the region in recent memory.

A spot check by KOMO News found that despite the tight inventory, homes that cost over \$1 million were easy to find.

"There is a lot of buyer fatigue going on right now . . . we're working to keep buyers motivated, but not pushing them," said Markwood, describing the housing market as crazy and stressful.

"It's just a wild market," said Markwood, who has 22 years of experience selling homes from Lake Forest Park to Bellevue and Seattle to Duvall. "I've never experienced this kind of market before. To show just how urgent things are, as soon as a listing hits the market we have to drop everything."

"What's really going on there (is) there are so few homes available for sale," Tucker said. "And a lot of determined buyers they converge on the handful of homes for sale and they start bidding against each other."

Tucker said about two-thirds of all listings in the Seattle region are selling above list price and as long as there are buyers who can afford it that trend will continue.

Markwood said she just wrote an offer in Bellevue for \$400,000.

Just last month in Bellevue a home sold for \$1 million over the asking price with Tucker noting that the market is extreme on the Eastside right now and fueling some of the fastest growth in the entire region.

	<p>He thinks in some cases that's not only because those buyers can afford it but more and more people in the market for a home are working from home and willing to be farther away from Seattle.</p> <p>He thinks one thing that could make a difference in the housing market is rising inventory, but that takes time and space.</p> <p>Both Tucker and Markwood said what's tough is that the market is squeezing many buyers out, forcing some of them to change their housing criteria or wait.</p> <p>Both advise buyers to know their financial limits, work with an experienced agent and if you find the perfect house then act quickly.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Seattle crew clears Mercer St. encampment
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/seattle-clears-notorious-encampment-at-mercero-street-in-south-lake-union
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — City crews on Wednesday cleared out an encampment on Mercer Street in Seattle's South Lake Union that has been the site of repeated police calls for violence and other nuisance crimes.</p> <p>Several municipal employees worked for much of the day to clear out dozens of tents at the location even though there were reports that the former camp residents had abandoned their tents and relocated to a nearby building by breaking into the location.</p> <p>Police were investigating the break-in reports as neighbors praised the city's decision to remove the camp, which took root in the location nearly two years ago.</p> <p>"It's just been ongoing," said Steve Burrows, who owns a business in the area. "It was a criminal den. It wasn't really homeless people."</p> <p>The camp has been a flashpoint for several violent skirmishes in the past, including a couple who were chased and attacked last summer by the people who they came to confront over stolen property.</p> <p>One of the campers was run over and killed during the dispute.</p> <p>The camp has also been the focal point in the past for out of control fires, armed robbery and persistent illegal drug use, neighbors have said.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said his administration will continue to work to get people off the streets.</p> <p>"The city needs to know my passion is to get Seattle back on track," he said. "And it's not people living in encampments. It's people living in housing."</p> <p>It was not immediately clear how many people were removed from the camp but officials said they were all offered some form of shelter and other support services."</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 UW in-person graduation returns June
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/university-of-washington-announces-in-person-graduation-return-for-this-semester
GIST	SEATTLE – The University of Washington is going to allow its students back to in-person commencement ceremonies for the first time since 2019.

	<p>UW said Wednesday morning it will host the celebrations at Alaska Airlines Field at Husky Stadium on June 11 for those graduating this year.</p> <p>However, those who graduated in 2020 or 2021 will also be allowed to walk the next day.</p> <p>The Bothell and Tacoma campuses are working on similar ceremonies.</p> <p>Bothel will host its ceremonies June 15 at Hec Edmundson Pavillion while UW Tacoma will host its June 13 at the Washington State Fairgrounds.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Recovery from historic Chehalis River flood
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/recovery-has-been-slow-for-some-communities-hit-by-historic-flooding-from-chehalis-river-in-january
GIST	<p>CHEHALIS, Wash. - Recovery from historic flooding has been slow for some communities in Lewis and Thurston counties. They're still feeling the impacts of the destruction caused by a massive overflow from the Chehalis River in January 2022.</p> <p>Crews from the Home Depot worked at the Lewis County Gospel Mission, Wednesday, making repairs. The interior of the building was destroyed by the flood after more than three-and-a-half feet of water got inside.</p> <p>"It was so much like an earthquake; you just can't explain the damage floodwaters do. Everything was on its side," said Tricia Ziese, executive director of the Lewis County Gospel Mission.</p> <p>It's been almost two months since the flood, but the mission remains closed as they work to recover from more than \$50,000 dollars of losses and damages.</p> <p>"We want to make sure that this building, that we not only protect it, but most importantly, that we are here for homeless services. So, we have to be up and running as fast as possible. This time it's taking us a little over two months, and honestly that's too long. We have folks in this community who are still waiting for a shower from before the flood," said Ziese.</p> <p>About four feet of drywall was removed from the interior of the whole building. Ziese said a local company donated and installed metal walls to better protect the space ahead of another potential weather event.</p> <p>"The reality is we're still in a flood zone. And so, it's just better to plan knowing that we're likely to flood again. And the metal can be easily removed in the future if we have another water incident," said Ziese.</p> <p>The January flood stretched across Lewis and Thurston counties. It shut down 20 miles of I-5 for several hours, more than 250 homes and businesses damaged. The state's Department of Ecology said January's flood became one of the six largest floods in the past 30 years on the Chehalis Basin, and peak flood levels continue rising.</p> <p>Between the years 2017 to 2021, the state spent about \$50 million completing 40 flood damage reduction projects as part of the Chehalis Basin Strategy. This includes levees and dikes, street regrades and a state-of-the-art flood warning system.</p> <p>The Office of the Chehalis Basin, through the Department of Ecology, said January's flood proves even more projects are needed to protect more public infrastructure and communities.</p> <p>"Storm events in the winter months are becoming more common, more frequent. And the intensity of those rain events are becoming even greater than they've been in the past. The cities of Hoquiam and Aberdeen down in the Grays Harbor area experienced literally the wettest day on record—the most rainfall they've</p>

ever experienced. And so, the science is telling us that we need to prepare for more frequent and more intense floods," said Andrea McNamara Doyle, Office of Chehalis Basin's director.

The legislature uses money from the capital budget to fund the basin's flood reduction projects. During the last legislative session, the basin received \$70 million to continue the work. However, this year, more funding for the basin was not on the agenda—though state lawmakers are having conversations about what happened to Lewis and Thurston counties. McNamara explained the office is currently using the \$70 million to fund projects underway right now.

McNamara Doyle said as climate changes, the frequency of 100-year floods could increase. She said her office will be requesting more money next year.

"We are protecting wastewater treatment plants from river erosion and flood damage. We're investing in projects that will protect water wells and help farmers get their equipment and their animals up out of harms way," said McNamara Doyle.

The [Chehalis Basin Board](#) has a [virtual meeting](#) scheduled for March 3 to continue discussing plans to improve the basin's flood reduction projects. Those impacted by the flood said they hope efforts will be enough to improve the basin before the possibility of another historic event.

"We look to our leaders and city council and hope that they are managing so they not only control the water levels here, but just in this community. We hate to see anybody go through this devastation," said Ziese.

Though their building is closed, Ziese said their mission never stopped. They're planning a grand reopening on March 14. In the meantime, Ziese and her staff had to get creative to continue their outreach with those experiencing homelessness.

"We are here for our friends in need—whether we're working out of our own vehicles, which we have, packing lunches at home, which we are," said Ziese with a laugh. "Nothing is slowing us down."

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HEADLINE	03/02 US: China knew Russia plan amid Olympics
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/us/politics/russia-ukraine-china.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — A Western intelligence report said senior Chinese officials told senior Russian officials in early February not to invade Ukraine before the end of the Winter Olympics in Beijing, according to senior Biden administration officials and a European official.</p> <p>The report indicates that senior Chinese officials had some level of direct knowledge about Russia's war plans or intentions before the invasion started last week. President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia met with President Xi Jinping of China in Beijing on Feb. 4 before the opening ceremony of the Olympics.</p> <p>Moscow and Beijing issued a 5,000-word statement at the time declaring that their partnership had “no limits,” denouncing NATO enlargement and asserting that they would establish a new global order with true “democracy.”</p> <p>The intelligence on the exchange between the Chinese and Russian officials was classified. It was collected by a Western intelligence service and considered credible by officials. Senior officials in the United States and allied governments passed it around as they discussed when Mr. Putin might attack Ukraine.</p> <p>However, different intelligence services had varying interpretations, and it is not clear how widely the information was shared.</p>

One official familiar with the intelligence said the material did not necessarily indicate the conversations about an invasion took place at the level of Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin. Other officials briefed on the intelligence declined to give further details. The officials spoke about the report on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the intelligence.

When asked by email on Wednesday whether Chinese officials had urged Russian officials to delay an invasion of Ukraine until after the Olympics, Liu Pengyu, the Chinese Embassy spokesman in Washington, said, "These claims are speculation without any basis, and are intended to blame-shift and smear China."

China held the closing ceremony of the Olympics on Feb. 20. The next day, Mr. Putin ordered more Russian troops to enter an insurgent-controlled area of eastern Ukraine after state television broadcast a meeting between him and his national security council and, separately, a furious speech in which he said Ukraine should be a part of Russia. Early on Feb. 24, the Russian military began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including carrying out attacks on cities with ballistic missiles, artillery and tanks.

American and European officials have said they find it hard to believe it is mere coincidence that Mr. Putin's invasion did not start until right after the Olympics. In August 2008, Russia invaded Georgia during the Summer Olympics in Beijing, which upset some Chinese officials.

This winter, Russia moved military units from its border with China and other parts of the east to near Ukraine and to Belarus to prepare for the invasion. The movements indicated a high level of trust between Russian and Chinese officials.

China and Russia have been strengthening their economic, diplomatic and military ties for years. Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin met 37 times as national leaders before their latest conclave in Beijing. The ambitious joint statement that the two nations issued during that meeting alarmed American and European officials, especially because it was the first time China had explicitly sided with Russia on issues concerning NATO and European security. European leaders have denounced China and Russia since then.

Representative Mike Gallagher, Republican of Wisconsin and a member of the House Intelligence Committee, said he was not familiar with the intelligence on discussions between Russia and China over Ukraine, but Beijing's support of Moscow was clear.

"The Chinese support all of Putin's narrative to blame the West for provoking Russia," Mr. Gallagher said. "I see no change in the Chinese views on Russia. They remain in a de facto alliance against the West at this point."

For months, some American officials tried to recruit China to help avert the war.

Days after President Biden spoke to Mr. Xi in a video summit on Nov. 15, senior American officials decided to present intelligence on the Russian troop buildup around Ukraine to senior Chinese officials to try to get them to persuade Mr. Putin to stand down. The Americans talked to Qin Gang, the Chinese ambassador in Washington, and to Wang Yi, the foreign minister. In a half-dozen meetings, including one in Washington between U.S. officials and the Chinese ambassador just hours before the Russian invasion, Chinese officials expressed skepticism that Mr. Putin would invade Ukraine, American officials said.

After one diplomatic exchange in December, U.S. officials received intelligence showing Beijing had shared the information with Moscow, telling the Russians that the United States was trying to sow discord and that China would not try to impede Russian plans, American officials said.

U.S. intelligence findings and assessments of Russian plans for an invasion of Ukraine have generally been accurate. The Americans began a campaign last fall to share intelligence with mainly ally and partner nations and to present declassified material to the public to build pressure on Russia to halt any planned invasion. William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, flew to Moscow on Nov. 2 to confront the Russians with the information, and on Nov. 17, American intelligence officials shared their findings with NATO.

British officials had assessed that an attack by Mr. Putin before the Olympics was possible but unlikely, according to multiple officials briefed on London's intelligence. That was partly based on the Western intelligence report, but mostly on an analytic assessment that Russia's plan to overcome Western sanctions was highly dependent on China's support and the notion that Mr. Putin would not risk angering Mr. Xi.

British officials also assessed that the joint statement issued by Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi was a clear sign of China's support, something that Beijing would have been reluctant to give if Mr. Putin was willing to overshadow the Olympics by beginning his assault before the end of the Games, according to people familiar with the British thinking.

American intelligence officials observed Moscow making final preparations around Feb. 10, the kinds of movements that immediately precede an attack.

Allied intelligence services learned from intercepted communications that senior Russian commanders were being brought together for a meeting, which some Western governments believed was the key decision point for commanders to begin the attack. This intelligence was part of what led Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser, to warn on Feb. 11 that a Russian attack could come before the end of the Olympics. Multiple officials also said at the time that U.S. officials had picked up intelligence that Russia was considering Feb. 16 as the possible start date for the invasion. That prediction turned out to be wrong, though only by a few days.

In assessing that Russia could ignore China's widely understood desire that peace be maintained through the Olympics, intelligence agencies took into account multiple considerations. While U.S. officials acknowledged that Mr. Putin's relationship with Mr. Xi was important, they believed Russia wanted to quickly begin, and complete, an attack before the readiness of its troops declined. Mr. Putin, American officials assessed, also did not want to be seen as overly deferential to another leader.

Both U.S. and British intelligence officials also wrongly assessed that supply problems that had plagued Russian forces in Belarus during exercises had been fixed, allowing an invasion to proceed, according to a person briefed on the assessment. In reality, the supply problems have continued to hamper Russian forces as they moved into Ukraine.

Since the war began, Chinese officials have consistently sided with Russia. They have expressed support for Russia's concerns about NATO and spoken of "sovereignty" in ambiguous terms. A Chinese government readout of a telephone conversation last Friday between Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin reiterated those points. Spokespeople for the Chinese Foreign Ministry have refused to call Russia's actions an "invasion" and blamed the United States for inflaming tensions around Ukraine.

China has also criticized the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and European nations.

On Wednesday, Wang Wenbin, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said at a news conference in Beijing that Russia and Ukraine should "seek a political solution that accommodates the legitimate security concerns of both sides."

China is trying to evacuate thousands of its citizens, including diplomats, from Ukraine. About 6,000 citizens were in Ukraine before those efforts began. At least one Chinese citizen was injured by gunfire on Tuesday while trying to leave Ukraine, Mr. Wang said.

The Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, spoke with the Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, on Tuesday about the Chinese citizens in the country, according to an official Chinese readout.

It is not clear what assurances, if any, Russian officials gave Chinese officials about the invasion. On Feb. 24, the day the full-scale invasion began, Hua Chunying, a Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, said: "We noted that today Russia announced its launch of a special military operation in eastern Ukraine. Russia's

	<p>Defense Ministry said that its armed forces will not conduct missile, air or artillery strikes on cities.” That promise turned to be false from the start.</p> <p>American and European officials are watching China to see whether it will help Russia evade sanctions or salvage the Russian economy. Before the invasion, Beijing and Moscow announced a 30-year contract for China to buy gas through a new pipeline. China has also lifted restrictions on the import of Russian wheat. But U.S. officials expect Chinese state-owned banks to avoid openly violating the sanctions for fear of jeopardizing their global commerce.</p> <p>In spite of the conflict, when the Paralympic Winter Games open in Beijing on Friday, athletes from Ukraine and Russia are still planning to compete.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Kviv mayor: 15,000 seek shelter in subway
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-shelters.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — As the escalator glides down the final few yards into the subway stop deep in Kyiv’s normally immaculate mass transit system, a sprawl of foam mattresses, suitcases and plastic bags filled with food comes into view. The space is surprisingly quiet, almost silent, despite the 200 or so people camped there to escape the bombing and artillery fire above.</p> <p>They sleep three or four to a single mattress. The children push toy cars over the gray granite slabs of the station floors, watching their mothers scroll endlessly on their cellphones, searching for news of the war.</p> <p>Little hands and feet stick out from underneath blankets, though it is noticeably warmer in the station than above ground. Volunteers come and go, bringing food and other necessities of life. One mother sets up a tent, for a modicum of privacy.</p> <p>“It’s not so comfortable,” admitted Ulyana, who is 9 and has been living in Dorohozhychi station with her mother and their cat for six days now. “But you see, this is the situation, and we just have to put up with it. It’s better to be here than to get into a situation outside.”</p> <p>As many as 15,000 people, the city’s mayor said Wednesday, most of them women and children, have taken up residence in Kyiv’s subway system to escape the grim conditions in the city as Russian forces bear down.</p> <p>And the subway is not the only subterranean refuge. Doctors at Maternity Hospital No. 5 in Kyiv, for example, have set up chambers in the basement to provide women a safe place to give birth. So far, five babies have been born in this way, said Dmytro Govseyev, the clinic’s director.</p> <p>Six days into the conflict, the Kremlin’s war plans remain unclear. The movements of tanks, artillery guns, armored personnel carriers and other heavy weaponry toward Kyiv, with a population of about 2.8 million before the exodus of evacuees, is raising grave alarms about the potential onset of bloody street fighting.</p> <p>But Russia might instead settle on a grinding siege punctuated with shelling and the cutting off of food supplies, water and ammunition in hopes of breaking the resistance without the destruction and killing of a frontal attack.</p> <p>Either way, life underground in Kyiv, already difficult, is likely to get even harder.</p> <p>Above ground, Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers who had been handed rifles just a few days ago were busy preparing for the Russians’ arrival.</p>

Preparations were evident on nearly every street: concrete barriers blocked roadways, tires set alight to form smoke screens lay everywhere and, in a new development Wednesday, signs warning of antitank mines dotted roads hastily closed to civilian cars.

A bullet-riddled S.U.V. lay abandoned on the side of a road near a checkpoint manned by civilian volunteers, apparently after having raised suspicions that it was carrying Russian saboteurs.

A cold, slushy snow fell, and the thud of explosions could be heard somewhere on the city's outskirts.

Though most people in Kyiv remain in their apartments, thousands have chosen to hide from the dangers above by taking cover in the subway system. They have lived for days in cramped, communal conditions, women and children of all ages, along with men too old to join the fighting above.

Olha Kovalchuk, a veterinarian, 45, and her daughter, Oksana, 18, a university ecology student, have been taking turns sleeping on a coveted wooden bench in the Dorohozhychi stop. "This is our space," Ms. Kovalchuk said.

Nearby, people crowded around a hastily improvised cellphone charging station. Fortunately, the subway system has well appointed public restrooms.

The stop is deep in the system's green line — the escalator ride to the station takes about a minute — and the stops ahead sound promising: the Palace of Sports, the Golden Gate, the Caves and Friendship of the Peoples. Yet, while trains do still run sporadically, nobody here was going anywhere.

"It's bad for the children," Ms. Kovalchuk said, surveying the scene. "I am just a veterinarian, not a doctor, but I can understand how bad this is for them. They are under stress. They cry at night."

Ms. Kovalchuk said she had been under such stress that she hardly slept. And she was seething with anger at the man who started the war, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. "I don't want to swear," she said. "I just hate that man with all my soul. Look how much pain he brought us."

Ukrainian officials have in recent days pleaded with Western nations to intervene by imposing a no-fly zone over Ukraine, a request that has been rebuffed, because it would risk sparking direct conflict between NATO and Russian forces. But Ms. Kovalchuk liked the idea.

"Please close the sky," she said.

Warning signs of Russia's intentions had been clear for years, not just during the military buildup that began last fall, she said. "I don't understand why the world didn't listen to Ukraine before."

Estimates of civilian casualties are unreliable, easily manipulated by both sides in the information sector of the war. A Ukrainian government agency that oversees fire departments and rescue services said in a statement Wednesday that 2,000 people had died. But the agency later issued a correction, saying, in what may be the most reliable account, that it had no idea how many people had been killed. Earlier estimates were in the hundreds.

Lyudmyla Denisova, the human rights ombudsman in the Ukrainian Parliament, issued a statement saying that 21 children had been killed and another 55 injured.

In the subway stop, Yulia Gerasimenko, a lawyer who had worked in Kyiv's now moribund real estate market, moved into the subway stop with her daughter, Ulyana, last Thursday evening, the first day of the war. By chance, her 6-year-old son had been staying with his grandmother outside Kyiv when the Russian incursion began. They made it out and are now in Germany. Her husband, a career military man, is fighting with the Ukrainian army.

She was glad her son was safe, she said. "But I wish I were near to him now."

HEADLINE	03/02 Reality of war dawning across Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/europe/russia-ukraine-war-casualties.html
GIST	<p>SOCHI, Russia — On Feb. 23, Razil Malikov, a tank driver in the Russian Army, called his family and said he would be home soon; his unit’s military drills in Crimea were just about wrapping up.</p> <p>The next morning, Russia invaded Ukraine, and Mr. Malikov hasn’t been heard from since. On Monday, Ukraine published a video of a captured soldier in his unit, apologizing for taking part in the invasion.</p> <p>“He had no idea they could send him to Ukraine,” Mr. Malikov’s brother, Rashid Allaberganov, said in a phone interview from the south-central Russian region of Bashkortostan. “Everyone is in a state of shock.”</p> <p>The reality of war is dawning across Russia.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the Russian Defense Ministry for the first time announced a death toll for Russian servicemen in the conflict. While casualty figures in wartime are notoriously unreliable — and Ukraine has put the total of Russian dead in the thousands — the 498 Moscow acknowledged in the seven days of fighting is the largest in any of its military operations since the war in Chechnya, which marked the beginning of President Vladimir V. Putin’s tenure in 1999.</p> <p>Russians who long avoided engaging with politics are now realizing that their country is fighting a deadly conflict, even as the Kremlin gets ever more aggressive in trying to shape the narrative. Its slow-motion crackdown on freedoms has become a whirlwind of repression of late, as the last vestiges of a free press faced extinction.</p> <p>This week, lawmakers proposed a 15-year prison sentence for people who post “fakes” about the war, and rumors are swirling about soon-to-be-closed borders or martial law. The Education Ministry scheduled a video lesson to be shown in schools nationwide on Thursday that described the war against Ukraine as a “liberation mission.”</p> <p>And in Moscow, the regional office of the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia has been fielding 2,000 calls a day since last Thursday.</p> <p>“The parents’ first question is: What happened to my child?” said Aleksandr Latynin, a senior committee official. “Is he alive?”</p> <p>Seizing on the worries of Russian families, Ukraine has pushed to publicize the fact that many young Russian soldiers were dying or being taken prisoner — a reality that the Russian military did not acknowledge until Sunday, the fourth day of the war. Ukrainian government agencies and volunteers have published videos of disoriented Russian prisoners of war saying they had no idea they were about to be part of an invasion until just before it began, and photographs and footage showed the bodies of Russian soldiers strewn on streets and fields.</p> <p>The videos are reaching some Russians directly. Yevgeniya A. Ivanova, for instance, identified a friend of hers, Viktor A. Golubev, who appeared in one of the videos. In it, Mr. Golubev said he “feels guilty for his wrong actions” on Ukrainian soil and calls on President Vladimir V. Putin “to find a compromise to avoid war.”</p> <p>To some Russians, the toll in human lives is reason enough to oppose the war, and OVD-Info, an activist group that tallies arrests, has counted at least 7,359 Russians detained during seven days of protests in scores of cities across the country.</p> <p>“It’s the third decade of the 21st century, and we are watching news about people burning in tanks and bombed-out buildings,” Aleksei A. Navalny, the opposition leader, wrote in a social media post from</p>

prison on Wednesday, calling on Russians to continue to rally despite the withering police crackdown. "Let's not 'be against war.' Let's fight against war."

Members of the Russian elite also continued to speak out. Lyudmila Narusova, a member of Russia's upper house of Parliament, told the independent Dozhd television channel on Sunday that dead Russian soldiers in Ukraine lay "unburied; wild, stray dogs gnawing on bodies that in some cases cannot be identified because they are burned."

"I do not identify myself with those representatives of the state that speak out in favor of the war," Ms. Narusova said. "I think they themselves do not know what they are doing. They are following orders without thinking."

The Russian International Affairs Council, a government-funded think tank, published an article by a prominent expert describing the war as a strategic debacle. The expert, Ivan Timofeev, said Ukrainian society would now "see Russia as an enemy for several decades to come." He added a veiled warning directed at government officials who were now cracking down on people speaking out against the war.

"History shows that those who look for 'traitors' sooner or later themselves become victims of 'enthusiasts' and 'well-wishers,'" Mr. Timofeev, the council's program director, wrote.

But the discontent showed no sign of affecting Mr. Putin's campaign, as Russia's assault on Ukraine widened, with heavy fighting reported for the port city of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. The government signaled it would only intensify its crackdown against the war's critics — including those who called it a "war" rather than, in the Kremlin's anodyne term, a "special military operation."

"Individuals who carry out falsification must be punished in the most severe way," said Vasily Piskaryov, a senior lawmaker in Mr. Putin's party. "They are discrediting the absolutely rightful and understandable actions of our armed forces."

His proposed punishment: 15 years in prison. The Parliament, which is controlled by the Kremlin, will take up the law on Friday.

Some feared that Mr. Putin could go even further, repressing dissent to an extent unseen in Russia since Soviet times. Tatiana Stanovaya, a scholar who has long studied Mr. Putin, wrote it was "more than logical" to expect that lawmakers this week would approve the imposition of martial law in order to block the open internet, ban all protests and restrict Russians from being able to leave the country.

Such speculation, fed by how quickly the Kremlin was moving to block access to individual news media outlets and arrest protesters, has led increasing numbers of Russians to flee the country.

Echo of Moscow, Russia's flagship liberal-leaning radio station, was taken off the air on Tuesday for the first time since the Soviet coup attempt of 1991. Leading staff members of Dozhd, Russia's only remaining independent television channel, left the country on Wednesday after access to its website was blocked.

"It's clear that the personal security of some of us is under threat," Tikhon Dzyadko, the channel's editor in chief, wrote, explaining why he had decided to "temporarily" depart.

There was also evidence that, even though the war took many Russians by surprise, significant numbers had come to accept it as unavoidable or forced upon Russia by an aggressive NATO. The economic crisis touched off by the West's harsh sanctions reinforced that narrative for some. On Wednesday, the ruble plumed new lows as more companies like Siemens and Oracle announced they would reduce their operations in Russia and as the central bank ordered the Moscow stock exchange to remain shut on Thursday for the fourth straight day.

	<p>At a Moscow shopping mall on Wednesday, a young couple lining up for cash at an A.T.M. said they opposed the war. And yet they said that the way the world was punishing them for it was not fair, either, considering that the United States had fought its own wars in recent decades without coming under harsh international sanctions.</p> <p>“Just as you can criticize the government, you can criticize Western countries,” said Maksim Filatov, 25, who manages a hookah-bar business. “When there were analogous situations in other countries involving the United States, there were no such attacks, and they didn’t drive the country into crisis.”</p> <p>And the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers, despite being a firsthand witness to the tragedy wrought by the war, had decided to support it, according to Mr. Latynin, the senior official. He echoed the words of Mr. Putin, who last week described his “special military operation” as one of “self-defense.”</p> <p>“We understand that no armed conflict comes without victims,” Mr. Latynin said. “But this was a necessary step, because it was impossible to go on like this.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 DOJ task force targets Russia oligarchs
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/us/politics/russian-oligarchs-justice-department.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Justice Department announced on Wednesday the creation of a task force to go after billionaire oligarchs who have aided President Vladimir V. Putin in his invasion of Ukraine, part of an effort by the United States to seize and freeze the assets of those who have violated sanctions.</p> <p>The task force will marshal the resources of various federal agencies to enforce the sweeping economic measures that the United States has imposed as Russia continues its unprovoked assault on Ukraine.</p> <p>“We will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to investigate, arrest and prosecute those whose criminal acts enable the Russian government to continue this unjust war,” Attorney General Merrick B. Garland said in a statement.</p> <p>The task force will be overseen by Lisa O. Monaco, the deputy attorney general. Andrew C. Adams, a veteran corruption prosecutor in the U.S. attorney’s office in Manhattan, will run the day-to-day operations, according to multiple people briefed on his new role who spoke on the condition of anonymity to disclose his name.</p> <p>The announcement of the task force came as the Biden administration is preparing another package of sanctions against more Russian oligarchs, according to a person familiar with the plans. And it followed a warning to oligarchs by President Biden in his State of the Union address on Tuesday night, in which he declared that the administration was “joining with European allies to find and seize their yachts, their luxury apartments, their private jets.”</p> <p>It is unclear how successful the Justice Department will be in pursuing wealthy Russians, but the department typically establishes task forces in a bid to underline its priorities and incentivize prosecutors to bring cases.</p> <p>“Catastrophic events, like 9/11 or the invasion of Ukraine, often prompt the government to take stock of the full menu of its enforcement tools to address a singular threat to international security,” said David H. Laufman, a partner at Wiggin and Dana who oversaw the enforcement of U.S. sanctions laws as a Justice Department official during the Obama and Trump administrations. “That’s what the Biden administration is doing here.”</p> <p>The creation of the team, called Task Force KleptoCapture, adds to the raft of actions that Western leaders have taken in recent days in an effort to undercut Mr. Putin and the politically connected elite in Russia who are believed to have close ties to him. By leveling potentially crippling sanctions on Russia’s</p>

financial institutions and beginning to freeze trillions of dollars in assets controlled by Moscow and by oligarchs, the United States and its allies hope to push Mr. Putin to withdraw from Ukraine.

The Biden administration has penalized several Russian entities, including the country's main development and military banks, one of its sovereign wealth funds and a subsidiary of the state-controlled energy giant Gazprom. It has sought to freeze Mr. Putin's assets as well as those of his foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, and other Russian national security officials. And it has curbed purchases of Russian sovereign bonds, barred some Russian banks from Western financial markets and cut off Russia's access to certain foreign technology products.

The European Union and Britain have taken similar punitive measures and also have banned some military-related exports to Russia. But Russia has forged ahead with its onslaught of attacks in Ukraine.

The creation of the task force reflects the harsh scrutiny cast on Russian oligarchs, many of whom built their fortunes because of their ties to Mr. Putin. Even though they may not be directly involved in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they enable Mr. Putin by helping him conceal his own assets and remain in power.

Russia's oligarchs have invested their fortunes in assets around the world, and their ties to Mr. Putin have helped them gain influence and connections in the worlds of fine art, real estate, Wall Street and Silicon Valley.

Some of Russia's elite are reportedly rushing to sell their assets to shield them from seizure, presumably in anticipation of sanctions. One of the country's most prominent oligarchs, Roman Abramovich, said on Wednesday that he would sell Chelsea, the Premier League soccer team.

Other oligarchs with ties to Moscow have hired American lobbyists and white-shoe law firms to try to weaken U.S. sanctions laws like the Magnitsky Act, a 2012 measure that initially imposed sanctions on some Russian government officials in response to human rights abuses.

While many American law and lobbying firms have stopped representing Russian entities, not all have. For example, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom, one of the nation's largest law firms, appears to be continuing to work on litigation related to the 2016 election with Alfa Bank, which the United States placed under sanctions last week. The penalties on Alfa Bank were milder than those imposed on some other Russian financial firms and did not require Skadden Arps to sever its ties; the law firm did not respond to requests for comment.

Alfa Bank was founded by the Ukrainian-Russian oligarch Mikhail Fridman, whom the European Union separately penalized this week, noting that he "has been referred to as a top Russian financier and enabler of Putin's inner circle."

Mr. Adams, who will lead the day-to-day operations of the task force, has a track record of investigating Russian organized crime and recovering illicit assets. He joined the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan in 2013 and worked in the violent and organized crime unit before helping oversee money laundering investigations.

He has helped lead the office's money laundering and transnational criminal enterprises unit since 2018. Under his leadership, the unit has successfully prosecuted cases involving an Armenian criminal organization, a bribery and money-laundering scheme involving Brazilian public officials, and a racehorse doping ring, among others.

The task force will include Justice Department prosecutors and investigators who have expertise in enforcing laws regarding sanctions, export controls, corruption, asset forfeiture, money laundering and taxes. And it will work with investigators from the I.R.S., the F.B.I., the Marshals Service, the Secret Service, the Department of Homeland Security and the Postal Inspection Service.

	<p>The task force will target people and companies that are trying to evade anti-money laundering laws, hide their identities from financial institutions and use cryptocurrencies to evade sanctions and launder money. The Justice Department said that it would use civil and criminal asset forfeiture to seize assets belonging to people subject to sanctions.</p> <p>The department said that its work would complement that of a trans-Atlantic task force announced this past weekend to identify and seize the assets of penalized Russian individuals and companies around the world.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 DOH: 1,427,013 cases, 11,954 deaths
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/coronavirus/article258990548.html
GIST	<p>The Washington state Department of Health reported 1,876 new COVID-19 cases Wednesday.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the state's preliminary death tally was 11,954. That number is up by 88 since Monday. The confirmed death tally as of Feb. 13 was 11,725.</p> <p>The statewide case total from the illness caused by the coronavirus stood at 1,427,013 cases on Wednesday.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 WA, King Co. Covid policies after March 11
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/coronavirus/article/What-Washington-and-King-County-s-COVID-policies-16969494.php
GIST	<p>Washington Gov. Jay Inslee will lift the most of the state's indoor masking requirements earlier than he originally planned as a result of new guidance from the federal government.</p> <p>"We are turning a page in our fight against the COVID virus," Inslee said during a Monday news conference. "This new page will be based more on empowering individuals and families in protecting themselves, rather than based on government restrictions."</p> <p>Those restrictions — which required masks be worn in most public indoor settings, including restaurants, bars, grocery stores, child care centers and gyms — were originally slated to expire March 21. Monday's announcement that those restrictions would instead expire March 12 was made in tandem with the governors of California and Oregon, and just days after CDC officials said masks were no longer necessary for most people.</p> <p>King County, which notably did not to commit to lifting its indoor mask requirements after Inslee announced last month that the state's would expire March 21, also said that its indoor masking restrictions would end March 12.</p> <p>Washington has seen a marked decline in new COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths since the omicron surge peaked in late January. New cases are down 67% over the last two weeks, while hospitalizations and deaths are down 39% and 35%, respectively.</p> <p>Last week, the Seattle P-I published an article that outlined how Washington state and King County coronavirus guidance would change after March 21. Now, we're updating that article to include the latest information from state and King County officials.</p> <p>Where are masks still required?</p> <p>After March 11, masks will still be required statewide in health care facilities, congregate living spaces and on public transit. That includes hospitals, doctors' and dentists' offices, pharmacies, long-term care facilities, jails, prisons, taxis and ride-share vehicles.</p>

Local governments and individual businesses statewide are also free to continue enforcing mask requirements, if they choose.

Where are masks not required?

After March 11, masks will no longer be required statewide for most indoor spaces, including K-12 schools, child care centers, restaurants, bars, libraries, places of worship, gyms, grocery stores and retail establishments.

What's new with schools?

The state will no longer require masks in its K-12 schools, but individual districts can still impose masking restrictions for their students and staff if they choose. Seattle Public Schools — the state's largest school district — said it [plans to keep masking requirements in place](#) until further notice despite the governor's announcement.

Masks are also no longer required on school buses statewide. That requirement was originally put in place by the federal government, but was stricken when the CDC announced its most recent guidance last week.

Inslee said more nuanced coronavirus policies for schools will be announced next week.

What about vaccine verification?

Proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test are no longer required for large events statewide. King County also terminated its vaccine verification policy for indoor establishments and large outdoor events.

However, individual businesses and venues across the state can still enforce such policies if they choose to.

Will these restrictions be brought back if the state's outbreak worsens?

It's possible. If a new, more transmissible variant emerges, it's likely that state and local health officials would consider reinstating restrictions. Inslee spokesperson Mike Faulk affirmed this in an email.

"[The] governor has said that if we face another significant variant that is overwhelming our hospitals and putting lives at risk, he would implement measures that are proven to work at curbing infection," he said. "Masks are proven to work at curbing infection."

The current consensus among the nation's top health officials is that we should treat COVID-19 like the weather. If it looks like it's going to rain, consider wearing a raincoat. If it looks like hospitalizations and deaths are rising, consider requiring masks or other restrictions. And so on.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Households 2 free Covid test kits monthly
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/wa-households-can-now-order-two-covid-test-kits-per-month-while-supplies-last/
GIST	<p>Washington public health officials on Wednesday announced an expansion of their program to distribute free COVID-19 tests throughout the state, continuing to push testing, masking and vaccinations as infection and hospitalization rates fall.</p> <p>As of Wednesday, the site that allows Washingtonians to order COVID test kits to their homes — sayyescovidhometest.org — will allow up to two orders per household every month while supplies last, said Lacy Fehrenbach, the state's deputy secretary of COVID-19 response.</p> <p>"Home tests are an excellent public health tool that help us know quickly and conveniently if we have COVID-19 so that we can take action to care for ourselves," she said.</p> <p>When the state Department of Health launched the site in January, each household could only order one kit, which contains up to five tests, due to limited supply.</p>

The state quickly ran out of tests and had to temporarily halt distribution while the department restocked its kits, but the site has since reopened.

As COVID trends — including seven-day rates for cases, hospitalizations and deaths — continue to decline, Fehrenbach and other public health leaders remained adamant that masking and getting vaccinated and boosted are still useful tools to stop future virus surges.

While infection and hospitalization rates aren't quite back to mid-December levels, before the omicron variant surged through the region, they're close. As of mid-February, the state Department of Health reported a seven-day average of 2,635 infections per day, compared to a peak of more than 19,000 daily cases in January. Hospitalizations are also at a recent average of 132 per day compared to nearly 300 daily hospitalizations in January.

"We're seeing a markedly better picture," said state Secretary of Health Dr. Umair A. Shah, though he reminded Washingtonians they could see additional safety and masking restrictions within their counties if cases pick back up.

"The pandemic is far from over, and we still have a lot of work ahead of us," Shah said.

As of last weekend, the state had delivered 13 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to more than 5.8 million people, including to more than 240,000 kids between 5 and 11, said Michele Roberts, who leads the state's COVID-19 vaccine planning and distribution team.

Nearly 81% of Washingtonians 5 and older have received at least one dose, she said.

Vaccination remains the "most important" way people can protect themselves, but masking and distancing will still help, state science officer Dr. Tao Sheng Kwan-Gett added.

"Just because after March 11, the law requiring indoor masking is going away, all the good reasons to wear masks — to decrease transmission in a community, to protect those who are most vulnerable to infection and severe disease, all those reasons — are still present," Kwan-Gett said. "So I think it becomes important for us as a matter of community responsibility ... to protect those who are most vulnerable."

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HEADLINE	03/02 Native Hawaiians' trust in military 'tainted'
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/tainted-water-shatters-native-hawaiians-trust-in-military/
GIST	<p>HONOLULU (AP) — A well-known adage in Hawaiian, ola i ka wai, means "water is life."</p> <p>Native Hawaiians revere water in all its forms as the embodiment of one of the Hawaiian pantheon's four principal gods.</p> <p>The resource is so valuable that to have it in abundance means prosperity. The Hawaiian word for water — wai — is repeated in the word for wealth — waiwai.</p> <p>So when the Navy confirmed petroleum from one of its fuel tank facilities had leaked into Pearl Harbor's tap water, many Native Hawaiians were not just concerned, they were hurt and offended.</p> <p>"This has been the most egregious assault on a public trust resource in the history of Hawaii," said Kamanamaikalani Beamer, a former trustee of the Commission on Water Resource Management.</p> <p>Nearly 6,000 people, mostly those living in military housing at or near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, got sick after petroleum-laced water came pouring out of their taps late last year. Residents worry fresh water for broader Oahu also is in danger because the aging tank system sits above an aquifer that provides drinking water to most of the island and has a history of leaks.</p>

The Navy is working to address the problem. But many say it has deepened a distrust in the military that dates to at least 1893, when a group of American businessmen, with support from U.S. Marines, overthrew the Hawaiian kingdom. More recently, Native Hawaiians fought to stop target practice bombing on the island of Kahoolawe and at Makua Valley in west Oahu.

“The military has a long history of poor stewardship of Hawaii’s natural and cultural resources,” Carmen Hulu Lindsey, chair of the board of trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, said in an email in response to questions. “Time after time the people of Hawaii have been left to clean up after the military ravages our sacred lands — from unexploded ordnance and toxic waste to the loss of cultural and historic sites and endangered species — without even appropriating resources to finance these efforts.”

For some, the water contamination was the last straw.

The crisis has “shattered people’s trust in the military,” said Kawena‘ulaokalā Kapahua, a Native Hawaiian political science doctoral student and one of the activists pushing to shut down the tank facility.

“I think this is really pushing people to the edge because we all need water to live,” Kapahua said. “And I think it’s a very scary thought for people that their children or their grandchildren may never be able to drink the water that comes out of the tap.”

Navy officials seemed aware of the distrust when they announced to members of Congress in January the Navy wouldn’t continue fighting Hawaii’s order to defuel the tanks.

“I understand the deep connection that the people of Hawaii, particularly the Native Hawaiian community, have with the lands and waters of Hawaii,” Rear Adm. Blake Converse, deputy commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, said while noting he lived in Hawaii off and on for more than eight years.

Rear Adm. John Korka, commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, also noted his connection to the islands, sharing which church he worshipped in and the Catholic school his children attended while living in Hawaii. “This is a personal issue for me, and I’m sorry.”

Using 2019 Census data, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs estimates that 3,439 Native Hawaiians across the United States serve in the armed forces, which is 0.8% of the total Native Hawaiian adult population in the U.S.

Many see value in the state’s relationship with the military, which also provides civilian jobs that are considered desirable alternatives to service work in the tourism industry.

Native Hawaiian Vietnam War veteran Shad Kane said he is troubled by the contaminated water, but it hasn’t tested his faith in the military. His trusty pickup truck bears special Hawaii license plates indicating he’s a combat veteran. He plans to transfer the plates to his new Toyota Tacoma.

“Yes, I’m bothered by that, but I also know the Navy has a greater responsibility,” Kane said. “The Navy wants to do the right thing.”

The Navy hasn’t determined how petroleum got in the water. Officials are investigating a theory that jet fuel spilled from a ruptured pipe last May and somehow entered a fire suppression system drain pipe. They suspect fuel then leaked from the second pipe Nov. 20, sending it into the drinking water well.

The Navy has been trying to clear petroleum from the contaminated well and pump it out of the aquifer. Officials are also flushing clean water through the Navy’s water system — which serves 93,000 people in military homes and offices in and around Pearl Harbor. In the meantime, the Navy put up affected military families in Waikiki hotels.

Beamer, the former water commission trustee, had been calling for the decommissioning of the tanks since 2014, when more than 27,000 gallons (102,200 liters) of fuel leaked from one of tanks.

The Navy “promised us nothing like this would possibly happen,” he recalled. “They would never risk the lives of their own. ... They drink out of the same aquifer.”

After initially resisting, the Navy said in January it would comply with Hawaii’s order to remove fuel from the tank facility, which is used to power many U.S. military ships and planes that patrol the Pacific Ocean. But in February, the Navy lodged an appeal in court.

Rear Adm. Tim Kott, commander of Navy Region Hawaii, said in a statement this week that Navy officials will continue to work with, listen to and learn from the Native Hawaiian community.

“We know we have a lot of work ahead of us to gain the trust of the communities across the island, and in particular Native Hawaiians,” he said. “We will continue to work tirelessly to restore community trust and the safe drinking water of our families and neighbors.”

U.S. Rep. Kaiali’i Kahele, a combat pilot who serves as an officer in the Hawaii National Guard, has invoked the Hawaiian word hewa, which can mean sinful or wrong, to describe the Navy water contamination. He has also called it “crisis of astronomical proportions.”

He traces his Native Hawaiian family’s roots to a small fishing village near the southern tip of Hawaii’s Big Island where there’s no running water and residents rely on catching rain.

Elders instilled in him that every drop is precious.

“All life originated through having healthy, fresh water,” Kahele said.

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HEADLINE	03/02 DOH: do not use recalled infant formulas
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/doh-advises-wa-families-to-not-use-recently-recalled-infant-formulas/
GIST	<p>The Washington Department of Health is advising caregivers to not feed their babies powdered formulas that were recently recalled due to possible bacterial contamination.</p> <p>Abbott Nutrition expanded its voluntary recall of Similac, Alimentum and EleCare powdered formulas manufactured at the company’s facility in Michigan. The formulas may be linked to several Cronobacter illnesses and two infant deaths nationwide, according to the DOH. The federal Food and Drug Administration is investigating. No known cases have been reported in Washington.</p> <p>People can identify the recalled products by examining the number on the bottom of each container. A recalled product will have all three of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A number starting with 22 through 37• The characters “K8,” “SH” or “Z2”• A use-by date that is April 1, 2022, or later <p>Abbott Nutrition has a website and phone number set up where people can check if their products have been recalled: similacrecall.com/us/en/home.html and 1-800-986-8540.</p> <p>According to the DOH, around 18,000 families in Washington who receive formula through the state’s Women, Infant and Children, or WIC, program may have been affected. A similar number of families not involved in the program may also be using recalled formulas, the DOH said.</p> <p>Washington WIC is working to provide formula alternatives, the DOH said. Since the department cannot guarantee alternatives will be available in every store, they are advising people call stores ahead of time to</p>

	<p>ensure formula is available. WIC families can also reach out to WIC clinics and check the WIC shopping app for updates, the DOH said. For families not on WIC, the DOH recommends reaching out to health care providers for support.</p> <p>The first symptom of Cronobacter infection in infants is often a fever accompanied by poor feeding, excessive crying or low energy, according to DOH. Some infants may have seizures. If your baby begins showing these symptoms or if they consumed the recalled formula, the DOH advises contacting your child's health care provider.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 World of for-profit human body donation
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/human-body-donation-research-for-life/281-7868479f-4815-481e-98f5-286c834f8644
GIST	<p>PHOENIX — There's a room inside the building that houses Research for Life that might seem straight from a horror movie.</p> <p>The "procurement room," stocked with mallets, chisels, autopsy tables and bones saws, is where specially trained technicians dissect human bodies, following instructions on a "cut sheet."</p> <p>Research for Life owner Garland Shreves understands that it is a hard concept for the general public to accept. But it's vitally important.</p> <p>"That's what whole body donation is doing – it's helping people to have a better quality of life (and) live longer," said Shreves, sitting in the building's bio-skills lab where doctors learn new medical procedures using actual human body parts. "We have the medicine we do today because of donors. That's a fact."</p> <p>After a series of stories uncovered abuses in the Pacific Northwest in the whole body donation trade, the KING 5 investigators requested interviews and tours from firms across the country. Two local companies, MedCure in Portland and BioGift in Everett, declined that request. Only Research for Life in Phoenix agreed to allow KING 5's camera inside.</p> <p>"(I want to be) very transparent with you to let you see everything we do. Let you see how tissue is stored. Most tissue banks are afraid to do that," Shreves said.</p> <p>Non-transplant anatomical donation (NADO) firms are not the same as organizations that harvest organs and tissues for transplant into a living human. Organ transplant, the kind of donation that you sign up for on your driver's license, is federally regulated. NADOs are not subject to federal laws, although some states have enacted their own legislation.</p> <p>That results in variation in how companies across the country solicit donations, maintain medical standards and track the body parts they sell.</p> <p>"Body brokers do not operate at this level. That's just the bottom line," Shreves said as he pointed to the medical precision and cleanliness of the operations at Research for Life.</p> <p>Shreves detests the term "body broker" and said it should only be applied to the fly-by-night operators that pop up and cause most of the problems.</p> <p>In October, the KING 5 investigators exposed an autopsy event in which paying customers watched the dissection of the cadaver of a 98-year old man. Spectators paid up to \$500 a ticket.</p> <p>A Las Vegas body broker, Med Ed Labs, said it was duped into providing the body to the show's organizers.</p>

Last month, KING 5 reported that several Washington state donors to former Seattle body broker Walter Mitchell had been [identified through DNA](#). Mitchell pleaded “not guilty” in Arizona to dumping 29 body parts in the desert near Prescott.

Donors or their next-of-kin may sign up with Research for Life before they die. The company offers presentations and tours showing how the body will be used to further medical research and education. The donor’s family receives a death certificate and cremated remains at the end of the process, free of charge.

“Here is a walk-in freezer where anatomical specimens are stored,” said Shreves as he stepped into an ice-cold room with bagged objects wrapped in blue medical gauze. Signs on the shelves revealed the contents: “brain whole,” “shoulder to finger-tip,” “head” and “hands.”

Shreves said a hand or foot, for example, might sell for anywhere between \$200 to \$400. He said dissecting the body is absolutely necessary to get the most research out of every donor.

“What if you were a neurosurgeon, and all you need is a human head to practice your skillset to become better, and you had to waste the entire body. That would be tragic,” said Shreves.

He says one body can be divided to use in six or seven different projects.

“This is the reality,” Shreves said. “If it makes you uncomfortable, then maybe being a donor isn't right for you.”

It’s Research for Life’s bio-skills lab that Shreves hopes will persuade potential donors. That’s the room where surgeons and doctors use human body parts to test new medical devices and learn new medical procedures.

“If we have the ability to help surgeons learn a new device that comes to market through this process, then we're helping to save lives. So that should never be lost on the public on how important a whole body donation is,” said Shreves.

The facility is spic and span, with employees dressed in medical scrubs using medical-grade tools, as opposed to body brokers that have been caught using chain saws to dissect bodies and throwing human remains into dumpsters.

The lack of federal laws requiring licensing and standards is the reason why unscrupulous operators infect the trade, according to Bryant Hightower, the past president of the National Funeral Directors Association. “These people tell a good story and they’ve duped a lot of families across this country by pulling their heartstrings,” said Hightower.

Hightower said the organization’s 20,000 members have told him stories about body brokers returning sawdust to donors’ families instead of cremated remains, donors’ remains being lost through improper tracking and families being lied to about what the donation would be used for.

“Funeral homes were duped much like the families were,” said Hightower of their dealings with some body brokers.

The Funeral Directors Association pushed for [HR 4062](#), a bill currently in the U.S. House of Representatives that would require NADOs to register with the federal government, create a “chain-of-custody” for each donated body part and meet other specified standards.

“Because there's a lack of federal regulation, once a problem crops up somewhere, these bad operators simply fold their tents and move across the state line and opened up shop again, in many times under a different name,” Hightower said.

The American Association of Tissue Banks, a nonprofit, accredits and inspects NADOs.

	<p>Research for Life is one of eight accredited NADOs in the U.S.</p> <p>The pushback against more regulation comes from some of the NADOs themselves.</p> <p>“This industry is already significantly and heavily regulated. And somebody would say, if that's the case, then how do you have bad actors? You have bad actors, because we're not holding these people accountable,” said Shreves.</p> <p>Shreves argues that more prosecutors should bring fraud charges against body brokers who make misrepresentations to donors or abuse cadavers, as Mitchell, the former Seattle body broker, is accused of.</p> <p>“Did you consent to having your human remains thrown out in the (desert)?” asked Shreves. “We already have laws on the books. It’s called ‘fraud.’”</p> <p>Interested in body donation?</p> <p>The American Association of Tissue Banks warns there are many firms that accept whole body donations in the US. But only seven of them are accredited by the AATB.</p> <p>This means that participating donation firms must: allow independent inspections of their facilities, maintain sufficient records and prove that they are providing a supply of safe, donated human tissue.</p>
Return to Top	Find a list of accredited body donation companies here.

HEADLINE	03/02 Efforts bring NBA back to Seattle continue
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-nba-rumors/281-aaf199b1-65b1-414a-b9b9-6d6acf421ea9
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The NBA is not returning to Seattle tomorrow or next week. But, the lines of communication remain as active and open as they have been in years.</p> <p>They closed nearly 14 years ago when the league voted to allow the SuperSonics to bolt for the Oklahoma plains. A financial settlement between the then-mayor and the ownership group on July 2, 2008, was the final straw, allowing the team to move and be rechristened under another name.</p> <p>Ever since, fans and sentimentalists have hung on every morsel of information and statement that could lead to an NBA return, whether it be a land deal, quote, or flirtation with city leadership.</p> <p>That leads us to this week.</p> <p>On Monday, Bill Simmons, a longtime columnist, NBA writer, and podcaster suggested he has "intel" that the league is going to expand to Las Vegas and Seattle, at a combined cost of \$6.5 to \$7 billion expansion fee. Simmons went on to say the league aims to have diverse ownership groups in both cities, with current NBA star LeBron James fronting the franchise in Vegas.</p> <p>In a statement to KING 5 on Wednesday, a league spokesperson flatly said, "There is no truth to it."</p> <p>Yet, it is clear that conversations continue and Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell is actively engaging.</p> <p>"The odds are high," Mayor Harrell said on Wednesday. "We're very intentional about it. I chase down rumors and I chase down actual people in a position to make that happen. I feel good about our opportunity."</p> <p>His predecessor, former Mayor Jenny Durkan, said in January 2021 that she'd been in touch with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and was "pretty optimistic" about a team return.</p>

Last fall, while on the campaign trail, Harrell told KING 5 he was in touch with people who were interested in owning a new Sonics franchise in more than one location.

The [SODO Arena group](#), fronted by Chris Hansen, has been accumulating land for a decade now. His group was rebuffed by the NBA in 2013, after a purchase agreement for the Sacramento Kings, and again in 2016 when the Seattle City Council narrowly voted to reject his application for a conditional one-block street vacation. That led the to request for proposals, and eventual construction, of a new sports and entertainment complex at Seattle Center.

Hansen has long suggested that even with the construction of [Climate Pledge Arena](#), he won't sell the land until the Sonics return. Public records show purchases have continued. After buying a pair of parcels in 2019, he bought another in November of 2021. The \$1.5 million deal to acquire the Pecos Pit lot on First Avenue now means Hansen, and his investors, now own 13.66 acres between T-Mobile Park on Edgar Martinez Way and the Starbucks Headquarters on Lander Street.

However, now with the city in business with the [Oak View Group](#) at Seattle Center, it would suggest the likeliest scenario involves Climate Pledge Arena. Oak View Group said it was built with the NBA in mind and that there is a designated NBA locker room in the building.

"Our work isn't done until that happens," said Seattle Kraken CEO Tod Leiweke about the Sonics scuttlebutt of the last 48 hours.

When asked specifically about Simmons' claim, Leiweke said, "I'm not going to agree or disagree. I'll tell you one thing we're not going to do is to get in front of the commissioner."

In the interim, Leiweke said, he's focused on building a foundation for the Kraken who have been highly successful off the ice but struggled to find wins on it.

"One miracle at the time," he repeated Wednesday. "We just keep dreaming. We're dreaming about bringing the Stanley Cup home, more events in that building, and bringing another team to the building."

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HEADLINE	03/03 Pandemic vs. endemic: the difference?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/covid-19-pandemic-endemic-difference-matters/story?id=83166723
GIST	<p>The United States marked a new stage in the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic when President Joe Biden announced in his State of the Union address Tuesday that "COVID-19 no longer need control our lives."</p> <p>The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic in March 2020 due to rapid spread of COVID-19 all across the globe.</p> <p>However, as many experts believe the virus that causes COVID-19 will never be eradicated, the world must at some point transition away from "pandemic" and toward an "endemic" phase.</p> <p>Pandemics are a widespread, rapid spread of disease, with exponentially rising cases over a large area. Endemic viruses, meanwhile, are constantly present and have a fairly predictable spread. That predictability allows health care systems and doctors to prepare and adapt, reducing loss of life.</p> <p>For a pandemic to reach an endemic phase, it would need to be "a situation where you have a background level" of disease, said Dr. Daniel McQuillen, president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America and a senior physician in the division of infectious diseases at Beth Israel Lahey Health in Massachusetts.</p> <p>This means that, while some people would still get infected, it wouldn't be an unbearable number with devastating consequences that overwhelms the public, hospital systems and providers.</p>

The seasonal flu, or influenza, is an example of an endemic virus. H1N1 influenza has had pandemic spread of variants in the past, such as the Spanish flu in 1918 and swine flu in 2009. Variants of these are now part of respiratory viruses that we encounter regularly.

“There’s not a hard and fast rule for when a pandemic becomes an endemic,” said Dr. Paul Goepfert, a professor of medicine in the University of Alabama at Birmingham's division of infectious diseases.

Without knowing if there may be another variant on the horizon and without a predictable pattern of disease, it’s still too soon to tell if the nation has reached an endemic phase.

That's why many Americans are concerned it’s too soon to lift mask mandates. There is still a lot of transmission, and young children and immunocompromised people are still vulnerable.

However, McQuillen said the new CDC guidelines are a reasonable shift, as they focus on local transmission and capacity.

“We’re going from trying to prevent disease completely to going more to how do we deal with preventing severe illness and hospitalizations and how do we prevent our health care system from getting so swamped that we can’t take care of even normal problems,” he said.

This must be determined at a local level.

“I think [the new CDC guidance] reflects this need to be flexible in how to respond to the pandemic,” said Dr. Natasha Chida, assistant professor in the division of infectious diseases at Johns Hopkins University.

Pandemics are “not a static experience,” she said. Some places in the country still have very low hospital capacity, so they would struggle to handle additional cases and thus would benefit from masking. But when numbers are low, we should “be able to have a normal type of experience,” she said.

Despite the new guidelines, many experts are hesitant to say the nation has entered an endemic phase just yet, as only time will tell if a new variant will arise and cause similar upheaval.

“Endemic is where you are seeing consistently low numbers, the health care system is able to manage it [and] people are able to get the care they need,” Chida said.

While the U.S. is getting close, numbers have dropped before and then new variants emerged, so it’s “too soon to say” if we are in this phase yet, she said.

To prepare for and prevent another wave, McQuillen, Goepfert and Chida each emphasized the importance of building better infrastructure for public health initiatives. This includes equitable vaccine distribution across the globe and increasing supply of treatments and testing -- items currently outlined in the White House’s new pandemic policy agenda.

Goepfert also noted the importance of supporting primary care providers, both in allowing them to administer vaccines in their clinics and ease of access to treatment.

“What the pandemic laid bare was that public health has been massively under-resourced for decades, and people suffered because of that,” Chida said.

Now, with more than 75% of Americans vaccinated, experts are hopeful that the country can move toward better control of the disease and toward a new endemic phase -- where we can control the disease, and it doesn’t control us.

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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/turkeys-inflation-hits-54-deepening-cost-living-woes-83223586
GIST	<p>ANKARA, Turkey -- Turkey's annual inflation rate further accelerated in February, official data showed Thursday, marking the biggest jump since 2002 and deepening the squeeze on households that are already struggling to purchase basic goods.</p> <p>The Turkish Statistical Institute said consumer prices rose 54.44% in February compared with a year ago. That is up from nearly 49% in January.</p> <p>In comparison, annual inflation increased by a record 5.8% in the 19 countries that use the euro currency in February and by 7.5% in the U.S. in January — the fastest pace in 40 years.</p> <p>In Turkey, the highest yearly price increase was in the transportation sector, at 75.75%, while the increase in food prices was 64.47%, according to the data.</p> <p>Turkish consumers have been hit with rising prices following a series of interest rate cuts last year that triggered a currency crisis.</p> <p>President Recep Tayyip Erdogan strongly opposes high borrowing costs, insisting that they cause inflation — a position that contradicts established economic thinking.</p> <p>Turkey's central bank has cut rates by 5 percentage points since September, to 14%, despite high inflation rates — before pausing them in January and February. The Turkish lira lost 44% of its value against the U.S. dollar last year.</p> <p>In a bid to bring some relief, the government last month reduced value-added tax on basic food to 1%, from the previous 8%.</p> <p>It also introduced a set of measures to reduce surging power bills, including readjusting the level under which higher electricity tariffs for households and some businesses using more energy kick in.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 UN Assembly demands Russia stop war
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/assembly-votes-demand-russia-stop-war-ukraine-83207066
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS -- The U.N. General Assembly voted at an emergency session Wednesday to demand an immediate halt to Moscow's attack on Ukraine and the withdrawal of all Russian troops, with sustained applause breaking out after a formidable show of support among the 193 member nations against the invasion.</p> <p>The vote on the "Aggression against Ukraine" resolution was 141-5, with 35 abstentions. It came as Russia bombarded Ukraine's second-largest city and besieged two important ports, and a huge convoy of Russian military vehicles was poised outside the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv.</p> <p>Only Belarus, Syria, North Korea and Eritrea joined Russia in opposing the measure, a powerful indication of the international isolation that Russian President Vladimir Putin faces for invading his country's smaller neighbor — and that the resolution's supporters sought to emphasize.</p> <p>The abstentions included China and India, as expected, but also some surprises from usual Russian allies Cuba and Nicaragua. And the United Arab Emirates, which abstained on Friday's similar Security Council resolution, voted "yes."</p> <p>Cuba had spoken in Russia's defense on Tuesday, with Ambassador Pedro Luis Cuesta blaming the crisis on what he said is the U.S. determination to keep expanding NATO toward Russia's borders and on the delivery of modern weapons to Ukraine, ignoring Russia's concerns for its own security. He told the assembly the resolution "suffers from lack of balance" and doesn't begin to address the concerns of both</p>

parties, or “the responsibility of those who took aggressive actions which precipitated the escalation of this conflict.”

Unlike Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, but they do have clout in reflecting international opinion. Under special emergency session rules, a resolution needs approval of two-thirds of those countries voting, and abstentions don’t count.

From Washington, U.S. President Joe Biden called the special session historic and a demonstration of “unprecedented global unity.”

“An overwhelming majority of the world recognizes that if we do not stand up to Putin’s Russia, it will only inflict further chaos and aggression on the world,” Biden said in a statement.

After Russia vetoed a similar Security Council resolution Friday, Ukraine and its supporters won approval for the assembly to hold an emergency special session -- the first since 1997 -- to try to spotlight opposition to Russia’s invasion.

Deploring Russia’s “aggression” against Ukraine “in the strongest terms,” the measure demands an immediate halt to Moscow’s use of force and the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all Russian forces.

The resolution says that Russia’s military operations in Ukraine “are on a scale that the international community has not seen in Europe in decades and that urgent action is needed to save this generation from the scourge of war.” It “urges the immediate peaceful resolution of the conflict” and reaffirms the assembly’s commitment “to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.”

The measure also condemns “the Russian Federation’s decision to increase the readiness of its nuclear forces” — an issue raised by many U.N. members concerned about that prospect.

Before the vote, Ukraine’s U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, told the assembly, “They have come to the Ukrainian soil, not only to kill some of us ... they have come to deprive Ukraine of the very right to exist.” He said that “the crimes are so barbaric that it is difficult to comprehend.”

Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia urged U.N. members to vote against the resolution, contending Western nations exerted “unprecedented pressure” with “open and cynical threats” to get support for the measure.

“This document will not allow us to end military activities. On the contrary, it could embolden Kyiv radicals and nationalists to continue to determine the policy of their country at any price,” Nebenzia warned.

"Your refusal to support today’s draft resolution is a vote for a peaceful Ukraine” that would not “be managed from the outside,” he said. “This was the aim of our special military operation, which the sponsors of this resolution tried to present as aggression.”

The resolution also calls on Russia to reverse a decision to recognize two separatist parts of eastern Ukraine as independent. The measure further deplores “the involvement of Belarus in this unlawful use of force against Ukraine,” a characterization that Belarussian Ambassador Valentin Rybakov flatly rejected in his speech to the assembly shortly before the vote.

He said Belarus' only involvement in the conflict was organizing talks, due to continue Thursday, between Russia and Ukraine. Belarus has taken Russia’s side, with Rybakov saying the resolution reflected “double standards” toward Russia and the West.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told reporters immediately after the vote: “The message of the General Assembly is loud and clear: End hostilities in Ukraine — now. Silence the guns — now. Open the door to dialogue and diplomacy — now.”

“We don’t have a moment to lose,” he said. “The brutal effects of the conflict are plain to see ... It threatens to get much, much worse.”

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield urged all countries to “keep the momentum going,” do everything possible to help the Ukrainian people, hold Russia accountable and “match our strong words with strong actions.”

Explaining China’s abstention, Ambassador Zhang Jun used more emotional language than at previous U.N. meetings, citing “dramatic changes of the situation in Ukraine” and calling what is unfolding “heart wrenching.” He reiterated Beijing’s support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, and for the peaceful settlements of all disputes in line with the U.N. Charter.

“The top priority right now is to ease the situation on the ground as much as possible, and prevent the situation from escalating or even getting out of control,” Zhang said.

During more than two days of meetings preceding the vote, there were speeches from about 120 countries.

From the tiny Pacific island nation of Palau to Europe’s economic powerhouse Germany, country after country lashed out at Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and urged support for the U.N. resolution.

There were only a few that supported Russia and some that took no position, such as South Africa. Urging compromise and diplomacy to find a lasting resolution to the crisis, South Africa abstained.

The resolution’s co-sponsors included Afghanistan, where the Taliban ousted the elected government last August, and Myanmar, where the military overthrew the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi on Feb. 1, 2021. But neither the Taliban nor Myanmar’s military government have gained U.N. recognition, so that support came from representatives of their previous governments.

During the meeting, some supporters of the resolution had signs under the nameplates of their countries in Ukraine’s blue and yellow colors reading: ”#TodayWeAreAllUkraine.”

British Ambassador Barbara Woodward said the vote sent a clear message that the assembly condemns Putin and supports Ukraine.

“We have stood up against those who seek to redraw the world’s borders by threat or use of force,” she said. “For if President Putin’s aggression against Ukraine goes unchecked, which country could be next?”

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	03/02 Ukraine conflict: how define cyberwar?
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/russia-ukraine-cyberwar-nato-geneva-microsoft/
GIST	<p>Legal scholars and cybersecurity experts are closely watching events in Ukraine with an eye on how the Russian invasion may redefine the laws of war for the cyber era.</p> <p>Many agree that Ukraine’s conflict with Russia — an established cyber superpower that isn’t hesitant about flexing its muscle aggressively — could test the rules of war in new and unexpected ways. Some say it already has.</p> <p>Exactly how these rules might be redefined is the subject of significant debate.</p>

In recent days, authorities as disparate as the president of Microsoft and the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee have weighed in on how NATO's Article 5 provision for "collective defense," the Geneva Convention's protections for civilian targets and other legal frameworks for armed conflict may be challenged in the coming weeks.

On Monday, Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., and the chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, [said at a Washington Post event](#) that he is very concerned Russian cyberattacks could cripple Ukraine's power grid, in an echo of what happened in 2015. While many experts have been surprised by [Russia's so-far minimal use of cyberattacks](#) in this conflict, several also have speculated that it is only a matter of time before Russia unleashes them.

Peter Singer, a strategist and senior fellow at the center-left New America think tank and author of a book on cyberwar, said that while Russia has not yet committed "Geneva Convention-level" war crimes in the cyber domain, he believes that could quickly change.

"The first couple of days of the invasion were based on a really bad Russian assumption that this would be a quick and easy win for them," Singer said. "As the war shifts ... to them trying to grind down and collapse the Ukrainian state and society, the concern is just as the gloves have started to come off in their missile and airstrikes, that we'll also see the same on the cyber side."

Warner said he is also worried about what's to come from the Russians in the cyber domain — and says it is very possible a Russian cyberattack could trigger [NATO's Article 5](#), drawing the United States and other allies into a broader conflict.

Cyberwarfare "doesn't respect geographic boundaries," Warner said. "It could end up bleeding into Poland ... If American troops and a truck crashed because the lights were out you could get very close to Article V. So, we are still in uncharted territory."

Some cybersecurity firms said they've already seen signs of wiper malware used in Ukraine [spilling into neighboring countries](#).

Warner said he "absolutely" believes cyberattacks should trigger Article 5 — [a power invoked just once since 1949](#), for the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks — just as a conventional military attack might. But he hedged, saying he doesn't believe the U.S. and its NATO allies should predetermine how and whether to escalate "until we see what kind of Russian activities take place here."

For its part, [NATO has repeatedly confirmed](#) that countries have the right to defend themselves in cyberspace. [Writing in Just Security](#), international law professor Michael Schmitt said the real question is whether Russian cyber tactics qualify as an "armed attack."

"The prevailing view is that, in the words of the International Court of Justice in [\[the 1986\] Nicaragua \[judgment\]](#), an armed attack is the 'most grave form' of a use of force," Schmitt wrote. "Thus, the scale and effects of any Russian cyber operations would have to be especially severe before triggering the right of individual or collective self-defense."

[France, for example, has suggested a cyber operation](#) would constitute an armed attack if it led to "substantial loss of life or considerable physical or economic damage."

Warner said more dialogue is needed to guide the U.S. and its allies on how to handle cyberwar. He called for the "equivalent of a cyber Geneva Convention" to govern how cyber tools are used to perpetrate acts of war, [an idea in circulation among cyber thinkers for several years](#).

But Singer said there is less ambiguity than Warner asserts and that an "armed attack," whether committed in the cyber domain or on a physical battlefield, is not difficult to spot or respond to.

“I can’t think of a single war that started over the theft of information, or even a blockade without any violence,” Singer said. “It’s always the violence part of it that is the initiation of the war ... It’s not about the means.”

Other defense experts questioned Warner’s contention that the U.S. would be drawn into an ally’s conflict based on a cyberattack. Aaron Hughes, deputy assistant secretary of defense for cyber policy in the Obama administration, doubts Article 5 would be easily triggered in the scenario Warner envisions, particularly given how hard it can be to provably attribute cyberattacks to specific attackers.

Hughes, now a non-resident expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said he believes the administration would be unlikely to enter a conflict based on a cyberattack trigger of Article 5.

However, a near-term Russian cyberattack on Ukraine could lead the U.S. and allies to grapple with other questions such as how to treat virtual assets belonging to one country if they are stored in a second or third country, Hughes said.

“What are the notification considerations for the second or third country that we need to go through to get to that asset?” Hughes asked.

Adm. James Stark, who oversaw operations related to the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and most recently served as president of the Naval War College, said it can be very hard to prove attribution for cyberattacks to the degree needed to trigger an Article 5 response, particularly since Russia and China are skilled enough to cover their tracks and can even make their exploits look like the work of others.

What kind of cyberattack would create an Article 5 violation “is essentially a political question, which is going to have to be answered at the time,” he said.

Civilian vs. military targets

Questions about how to define cyberwarfare are not only being raised by government and defense officials but also by others. On Monday, Brad Smith, Microsoft’s president and vice chair, [issued a statement about cyberattacks taking aim at Ukraine’s digital infrastructure](#).

Smith called the cyberattacks “precisely targeted” — unlike the malware which spread across the region in the 2017 [NotPetya](#) attack for which the U.S. has blamed Russia — but he said Microsoft remains “especially concerned” about recent cyberattacks on Ukrainian civilian digital targets, including the financial, agriculture, and energy sectors.

“These attacks on civilian targets raise serious concerns under the Geneva Conventions,” Smith said. But Bobby Chesney, a professor at the University of Texas School of Law who writes on a variety of national security and cybersecurity issues, said in an email that the “relevant laws of war regarding attacks on civilian targets (which are generally unlawful already and clearly so) don’t have anything to do with the actual Geneva Conventions.” [The Geneva Conventions](#) are entirely focused on the treatment of people who are in the custody or power of a party to the conflict, Chesney said.

The existing framework for the law of armed conflict applies to cyberwarfare. Chesney said that given this it is very unlikely the Atlantic Charter, which was a statement of British and U.S. principles during World War II, will be significantly revised to account for cyberwar tactics anytime soon. He noted that while most international treaties were written before there was a cyber domain, they also pre-date many other battlefield technologies.

“The idea that technology opens up new ways for nations to fight each other doesn’t mean that the laws of war go out the window,” he said in an interview.

Chesney said uncertainties are inherent to all armed conflicts, citing sabotage and covert operations in physical warfare. But he acknowledged that with cyberwarfare there is an “additional layer of scale” to

	<p>the uncertainty. For example, Chesney said there is debate about what types of cyberwarfare might count as “an attack in the way that an airstrike would count as an attack.”</p> <p>A cyberattack on a bank website might impact civilians but would very likely not be treated with the same level of seriousness that disabling a power grid would, he said.</p> <p>But it may not be troubling to let the rules for cyber engagement remain murky, he added, because it gives leaders leeway not to escalate a situation. NATO determining an Article 5 violation had occurred could lead to very serious consequences.</p> <p>“Strategic ambiguity,” Chesney said, “isn’t always a bad thing.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Conti gang dismantles infrastructure
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/ransomware/conti-ransomware-gang-dismantles-infrastructure-amid-ukraine-row
GIST	<p>The Conti ransomware gang quickly dismantled back-end and command-and-control infrastructure Wednesday night following a week-long revolt by its affiliates after the gang signaled its support for Russia during Ukrainian hostilities.</p> <p>Conti generated \$180 million in revenue in 2021 according to a Chainalysis report, making it the most active ransomware group for the year.</p> <p>Wednesday evening, Radoje Vasovic, founder of the European cybersecurity firm Cybernite, noted internal chatter from Conti's chat servers discussing the tear-down of the group's infrastructure.</p> <p>"All VM farms are cleared and deleted, all servers are disabled," wrote one member in Russian.</p> <p>The abrupt shutdown of infrastructure follows a rough week for the criminal nuisance. On Friday, Conti issued a statement saying that it would retaliate against Western critical infrastructure if Western nations targeted Russian infrastructure during the Ukraine conflict. That proved to be a misstep with many of Conti's business partners.</p> <p>Conti, a ransomware-as-a-service provider (RaaS), licenses the use of the ransomware it codes to separate hacker groups, many of whom are based in Ukraine or otherwise backing the Ukraine side of the conflict. One group retaliated by leaking source code and internal chat logs, implicating Conti as taking orders from Russian intelligence during one operation. After the damage to Conti became clear, rival RaaS group LockBit issued its own statement, declaring neutrality.</p> <p>Allan Liska, a ransomware intelligence expert with Recorded Future, audited around 25 back-end and command-and-control servers mentioned in the leaks, all of which were offline.</p> <p>Conti's clients appear to be jumping ship.</p> <p>"Affiliates are already hopping to other RaaS offerings," said Liska</p> <p>Conti's extortion server, at present, is still online.</p> <p>Dismantling internal infrastructure is not a good sign for the group, but many ransomware groups have successfully rebranded and relaunched in the past.</p> <p>"Ransomware groups have been resilient before, but we've also never seen a disaster like this," said Liska.</p>

	"There is an assumption they will rebrand. But I think they will have trouble earning anyone's trust," he added.
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HEADLINE	03/02 Army of cyber hackers rise up, aid Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/army-cyber-hackers-rise-back-ukraine
GIST	<p>An army of volunteer hackers is rising up in cyberspace to defend Ukraine, though internet specialists are calling on geeks and other "hacktivists" to stay out of a potentially very dangerous computer war.</p> <p>According to Livia Tibirna, an analyst at cyber security firm Sekoia, nearly 260,000 people have joined the "IT Army" of volunteer hackers, which was set up at the initiative of Ukraine's digital minister Mykhailo Fedorov.</p> <p>The group, which can be accessed via the encrypted messaging service Telegram, has a list of potential targets in Russia, companies and institutions, for the hackers to target.</p> <p>It's difficult to judge the effect the cyber-army is having.</p> <p>The actions reported so far seem to be limited to "denial of service" (DOS) attacks, where multiple requests are sent to a website in a coordinated manner to saturate it and bring it down. Defacement actions, in which the targeted site displays a hacked page, have also been briefly observed on Russian sites.</p> <p>The "cyber-army" could also ask hackers to try to identify vulnerabilities of certain Russian sites, and send that info to more seasoned specialists capable of carrying out more sophisticated intrusive actions, such as data theft or destruction, explains Clement Domingo, co-founder of the "Hackers Without Borders" group.</p> <p>But he and other specialists consulted by AFP warned the hackers against participating in the activities of the "IT Army", or other cyber mavericks like Anonymous.</p> <p>'Too much risk'</p> <p>"I strongly advise against joining these actions," says Damien Bancal, who is well-versed in the opaque world of cybercrime. "There are plenty of other ways to help Ukrainians who are suffering", if only by relaying the testimonies that are flourishing on social networks, he adds.</p> <p>For SwitHak, a cybersecurity researcher, the maverick hackers are taking "too much risk".</p> <p>"There are legal risks, for example," he said, Attempting to attack a website or penetrate a server or network is "computer crime".</p> <p>For Domingo there is also a real risk of "hack back," a destructive counterattack by Russian operatives. He is particularly appalled to see that a number of candidate hackers have obviously not taken the trouble to create a special Telegram account to participate in the IT Army, at the risk of being identified by the Russian side.</p> <p>In cyberspace, and in particular on forums and other discussion groups on Telegram or Discord, "you don't know who's who", insists Felix Aime, another researcher at Sekoia.</p> <p>Inexperienced hackers can find themselves caught up with infiltrators from the opposite camp, and end up working for the very opponent they wanted to fight, he warns.</p> <p>Between the experienced hackers, who carry out ransomware attacks, the fight is on.</p>

	<p>The Conti ransomware group, which declared its support for Russia, saw one of its pro-Ukrainian members publish more than a year's worth of its internal communications in retaliation, offering a treasure trove of information to the world's cyber security researchers, police and spy specialists.</p> <p>The forums where cybercriminals meet "try to stay away from any debate" on the Russian-Ukrainian war to avoid attracting the attention of state services, says Sekoia analyst Tibirna.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Firmware security 'single point of failure'
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/us-gov-issues-stark-warning-calling-firmware-security-single-point-failure
GIST	<p>The U.S. government, at the very highest levels, is calling attention to major weaknesses in the firmware supply chain, warning that the layer below the operating system is fertile ground for devastating hacker attacks.</p> <p>A new joint draft report issued by leadership of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Commerce said firmware presented “a large and ever-expanding attack surface” for malicious hackers to subvert the core of modern computing.</p> <p>“Securing the firmware layer is often overlooked, but it is a single point of failure in devices and is one of the stealthiest methods in which an attacker can compromise devices at scale.”</p> <p>“Attackers can subvert OS and hypervisor visibility and bypass most security systems, hide, and persist in networks and devices for extended periods of time while conducting attack operations, and inflict irrevocable damage,” the two agencies said following a one-year assessment of the supply chains for critical IT infrastructure deployed in the United States.</p> <p>“Firmware can also be a lucrative target with a relatively low cost of attack. Over the past few years, hackers have increasingly targeted firmware to launch devastating attacks.”</p> <p>The 96-page report (PDF), published to support the Biden Executive Order on securing America’s supply chains, warned that firmware’s privileged position in the computing stack gives stealthy attackers a major advantage.</p> <p>Despite its essential role in electronic devices, the agencies insisted that firmware security “has not traditionally been a high priority for manufacturers or users and is not always well protected.”</p> <p>During the assessment, the agencies found that firmware on items such as network cards, Wi-Fi adapters, and USB hubs are often not properly signed with public or private keys.</p> <p>“These devices have no way to verify that the operating firmware is authentic and can be trusted.”</p> <p>Even worse, the agencies called special attention to the fact that OEMs and computer makers outsource firmware development to third party suppliers. “[This] introduces risks related to the lack of transparency into suppliers’ programming and cybersecurity standards.”</p> <p>The government’s warning comes as threat hunters spot signs that nation-state APT actors are using UEFI firmware implants to maintain stealthy infections and survive reboots and OS reinstallations. The notorious FinSpy surveillance spyware toolkit was also fitted with a bootkit to conduct stealthy infections.</p> <p>In the report, the agencies also warned of “complex supply chains” that compound the problems securing firmware deployments.</p> <p>“In PC production, for example, the OEMs are typically responsible for firmware and the rest of the PC platform elements. However, many OEMs outsource firmware development to third-party suppliers where OEMs may not have visibility into their cybersecurity hygiene. Even if OEMs establish security</p>

standards, they may not be able to enforce supplier security protocols across a wide range of components and sub-suppliers,” the government agencies warned.

The report also noted that individual OEM vendors may modify the firmware based on device needs once the firmware has been delivered to the OEM. “This can lead to confusion about what party is ultimately responsible for firmware integrity and who is to supply customer updates.”

“In addition, as devices and firmware change, OEMs often contract with different firmware developers, which can lead to delays or a lack of any update when older devices require updating and the original developer is not available. All of these factors can leave firmware open to malicious attacks,” the report said.

The agencies also called attention to the pain-point of applying firmware updates. “A firmware’s update process and capability vary by device. Some devices receive regular firmware updates. Some may only receive one update over their lifetimes, while others may never receive an update.”

Even worse, the process to install firmware updates is not simple, leading to skipped patches for critical-level vulnerabilities.

“Firmware updates present a major logistical challenge for many enterprises,” the agencies said. “In many instances, device firmware is never updated or may only be updated in an emergency. In addition, vendors may only supply firmware updates if driven by an incident or identified vulnerability.”

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HEADLINE	03/02 Russia attack prompts health sector alert
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/malware/threat-groups-with-russian-ties-malware-used-in-ukraine-prompts-alert-for-us-health-sector?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Entities in the healthcare and public health sectors should be vigilant in monitoring for and proactively working to prevent falling victim to wiper malware and attacks from threat groups with ties to Russia, in light of the unprovoked attack on Ukraine, according to an alert from The Department of Health and Human Services Cybersecurity Coordination Center.</p> <p>The alert joins an earlier American Hospital Association advisory that details the recommended remediation efforts provider entities should employ to proactively bolster their cyber posture in light of the heightened threat to infrastructure organizations.</p> <p>The ongoing conflict has “spilled into cyberspace,” with allies on both sides working to thwart cyber capabilities of the other groups. The newest alert shines a light of the specific tactics and malware-based threats that could potentially impact healthcare delivery organizations.</p> <p>At the moment, HC3 is unaware of any specific threat to the healthcare sector, but two malware variants are expected to be “utilized in any collateral attacks, which may impact the U.S. healthcare and public health sector in this campaign.”</p> <p>The alert also details three threat groups that could potentially impact these sectors, which include Russian government agencies, Russian-based cybercriminal groups, and other entities that aren’t part of the government.</p> <p>“This is not to say that other threat actors can or will not get involved, but these three groups are the primary focus at this time,” according to the alert. “It is very possible that other cybercriminal groups have or will join the conflict, and will bring with them their custom tools, tactics, techniques, and weapons.”</p> <p>Alert highlights Conti threat group, malware observed in Ukraine</p>

Russia is well known for its cyber capabilities that target “critical infrastructure in furtherance of their geopolitical goals.” In particular, the 2017 NotPetya incident launched against Ukraine had a rippling effect across the globe, including at least 10 entities tied to the U.S. healthcare sector.

Specifically, healthcare entities should familiarize themselves with [the tactics used by Conti](#), which has notoriously targeted the healthcare sector, even amid the ongoing pandemic crisis. Conti is known to exploit Managed Service Providers (MSPs), while employing big game hunting, multi-stage attacks, and extortion efforts combined with ransomware attacks.

Providers should also review insights on two wiper malware variants currently in “significant use” against Ukraine: [HermeticWiper](#) and [WhisperGate](#).

HermeticWiper is a new form of disk-wiping malware with at least one version identified with the filename Trojan.Killdisk, used to attack Ukraine organizations just before the Russian invasion. The malware is deployed with an executable file, signed with a certificate issued to “Hermetica Digital Ltd” and contains 32-bit and 64-bit driver files compressed by the Lempel-Ziv algorithm.

“The malware will drop the corresponding file according to the operating system version of the infected system,” the alert notes. Once deployed, “the wiper will damage the Master Boot Record (MBR) of the infected computer, rendering it inoperable.”

The wiper targets Windows devices and manipulates the boot record in such a way that causes failure. It also adjusts its process token privileges, while giving the malware read-access control to any file in the access control list. Outside of its destructive capabilities, the HermeticWiper appears to not have any further capabilities.

The second wiper malware variant of note, WhisperGate, is a new form of disk-wiping malware believed to operate in three parts: a file wiper, a bootloader that corrupts local disks, and a Discord-based downloader. The bootload complements its file-wiper counterpart, which work in tandem to “irrevocably corrupt the victim’s data and attempt to disguise themselves as ransomware operations.”

Security researchers have identified a number of variants of both HermeticWiper and WhisperGate in the wild, for which HC3 included a list of resources provider organizations should review to best understand the threat and impacts. These resources include recommended defense, mitigation, and remediation measures and indicators of compromise.

Further, HC3 stressed that these are just two possible malware variants with potential healthcare impacts. Given Russia’s high capabilities, providers should review federal insights on Russian-backed threats and tactics.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Ukraine sites face massive surge in attacks
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ukrainian-sites-saw-a-10x-increase-in-attacks-when-invasion-started/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Internet security companies have recorded a massive wave of attacks against Ukrainian WordPress sites since Russia invaded Ukraine, aiming to take down the websites and cause general demoralization.</p> <p>Cybersecurity firm Wordfence, which protects 8,320 WordPress websites belonging to universities, government, military, and law enforcement entities in Ukraine, reports having recorded 144,000 attacks on February 25 alone.</p> <p>The focus of the attacks appears to be a subset of 376 academic websites that received 209,624 attacks between February 25 and 27.</p>

This massive wave of coordinated attacks has resulted in the compromise of 30 Ukrainian university websites, which mostly suffered complete defacement and service unavailability.

“We will use the term “attack” in this blog post to indicate a sophisticated exploit attempt. This does not include simple brute force attacks (login guessing attempts) or distributed denial of service traffic” explains a [blog post](#) by Wordfence.

“It only includes attempts to exploit a vulnerability on a target WordPress website, which are the sites that Wordfence protects.”

Targeting Ukraine education

The hacking group behind these attacks is a pro-Russian group called “theMx0nday,” who have [posted evidence](#) of the hacks on defacement aggregator Zone-H.

Wordfence has found that the threat actors are based in Brazil but routed their attacks via Finish IP addresses using the anonymous internet service provider Njalla.

The particular group of actors has previously attacked Brazilian, Indonesian, Spanish, Argentinian, US, and Turkish websites, while their first entries on Zone-H date back to April 2019.

Wordfence takes special measures

For the first time in its history, Wordfence has decided to deploy real-time threat intelligence to all Ukrainian websites regardless of their subscription tier to its services. Usually, this feature is only available to Premium customers.

“We are doing this to assist in blocking cyberattacks targeting Ukraine. This update requires no action from users of the Free version of Wordfence on the UA top-level domain,” details Wordfence.

“We are activating this live security feed for UA websites automatically until further notice. Within the next few hours, over 8,000 Ukrainian websites running the free version of Wordfence will automatically become far more secure against attacks, like these, that are targeting them.”

The IP addresses used in these attacks have already been added to the associated blocklists, which are dynamically updated to add fresh IPs used in regular rotation.

Additionally, Wordfence will immediately push all new firewall rules to Ukrainian websites, without a 30-day delay that is usually associated with the customers using a free license.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Russia: hacking satellites an act of war
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/russian-space-agency-says-hacking-satellites-is-an-act-of-war/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Russia will consider any cyberattacks targeting Russian satellite infrastructure an act of war, as the country's space agency director said in a TV interview.</p> <p>Dmitry Rogozin, the current head of the Russian Roscosmos State Space Corporation, added that such attempts would also be considered crimes and investigated by Russia's law enforcement agencies.</p> <p>"Because disabling the satellite group of any country is generally a casus belli, that is, a reason to go to war. And we will be looking for those who organized it," Rogozin said on Rossiya 24 (VGTRK).</p> <p>"We will send all necessary materials to the Federal Security Service, the Investigative Committee, and the Prosecutor General's Office for relevant criminal cases to be opened."</p>

While not directly hit by hackers, satellite systems have been used before in cyberattacks, with the Russian-backed Turla cyber-espionage group famously [hijacking satellite Internet links](#) to deliver malware to remote areas.

Chinese-sponsored [Lotus Blossom also targeted](#) and infected a Southeast Asian satellite communications operator's systems used to monitor and control satellites.

Rogozin denies Roscosmos hack

On Monday, Anonymous-linked Network Battalion 65 (NB65) [claimed](#) it hacked and shut down some Roscosmos servers.

Rogozin [denied](#) their claims saying the Russian space agency's activity control centers operate normally and called NB65 "scammers and petty swindlers."

Two days later, Roscosmos [asked for guarantees](#) Wednesday that OneWeb satellites (part of a future worldwide network providing Internet broadband services) will not be used for military purposes, as Reuters first [reported](#).

Rogozin [added](#) that the Soyuz rocket planned to put 36 OneWeb satellites in orbit this week would not launch unless the UK government doesn't withdraw from OneWeb and sell its share.

However, these demands were later dismissed by UK Business & Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, who [refused any negotiations](#) and said that the UK government would not be selling its share.

"I give you two days to think. There will be no guarantees of non-military use of the system - there will be no system," Rogozin [replied](#).

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HEADLINE	03/02 DanaBot DDoS attack against Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.zscaler.com/blogs/security-research/danabot-launches-ddos-attack-against-ukrainian-ministry-defense?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Key Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A threat actor using DanaBot has launched a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack against the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's webmail server.• The DDoS attack was launched by leveraging DanaBot to deliver a second-stage malware payload using the download and execute command.• It is unclear whether this is an act of individual hacktivism, state-sponsored, or possibly a false flag operation. <p>DanaBot, first discovered in 2018, is a malware-as-a-service platform where threat actors, known as <i>affiliates</i> are identified by <i>affiliate IDs</i>. These affiliates purchase access to the platform from another threat actor who develops the malware and command and control (C2) panel, sets up and maintains the shared C2 infrastructure, and provides sales and customer support. Affiliates then distribute and use the malware as they see fit--mostly to steal credentials and commit banking fraud.</p> <p>On Wednesday March 2, 2022, in the midst of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, the threat actor identified by the affiliate ID 5 launched an HTTP-based Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack against the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense's webmail server with the URL <code>hxxps://post.mil.gov[.]ua</code></p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>While the timing and targeting certainly suggest this new attack is related to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is unclear whether this is an act of individual hacktivism, something state-sponsored, or possibly a false flag operation. If the threat actor's motive is to attack Ukraine, it is quite likely that in addition to the DDoS attack, the actor is using DanaBot's more typical functionality such as credential theft and document theft against any relevant victims as well.</p>

HEADLINE	03/02 War struck; Ukraine turned to Telegram
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/telegram-ukraine-russia-channels-signal/
GIST	<p>EVERY DAY FOR the past two years, thousands of Ukrainians opened the official Covid-19 Telegram channel for the latest pandemic news. The @COVID19_Ukraine account shared daily case figures, the number of people who had died, and the government's latest health advice. Millions read the channel during the global health crisis.</p> <p>But as Russian troops marched toward Ukraine's borders, the channel responded. It asked whether members wanted updates on the latest "socio-political" news? People overwhelmingly voted for the change. Since then the Telegram channel has shared the latest war news 24 hours a day—changing its display name to @UkraineNOW—and become an essential source of verified information for Ukrainian citizens.</p> <p>In the days since the war started, WIRED has reviewed hundreds of Telegram posts from verified Ukrainian government accounts and politicians. Their messages help keep people safe, debunk potential Russian disinformation, and counter emerging threats. Wartime propaganda is mixed with practical safety advice. Disinformation rebuttals are peppered among requests to spot Russian saboteurs. And alleged videos of captured Russians sit alongside photos of babies born in air raid shelters. All of this unfolds in real time, with accounts posting hundreds of messages per day.</p> <p>"How to distinguish our equipment from the enemy?" UkraineNOW posted on Friday, sharing pictures of Ukrainian and Russian tanks. On Saturday, three separate posts in the space of just six minutes warned of imminent airstrikes across Ukraine ("air alarm: Lviv, Rivne !!!"); maps showing air raid shelter locations were shared. On Sunday the channel advised on ways to safely pass military checkpoints ("turn on the hazard warning light, no video recording") and what to do if there are attacks on chemical processing plants ("close the windows and do not open them unnecessarily").</p> <p>With nearly 500,000 members before Russia's invasion, UkraineNOW was already one of the country's biggest Telegram channels. Now a million people depend on it for updates about the war. Its posts, which are shared by other channels, get around 8 million views a day. On February 26, UkraineNOW posted 139 times and forwarded another 54 messages from other Telegram accounts; before the invasion it posted three to five times per day. Its evolution and continued growth provides a glimpse of how the social media app has helped keep citizens up to date on Russia's invasion with verified information during a time when platforms have struggled to handle a flood of misinformation and disinformation.</p> <p>"From bomb shelters, on the road, in different parts of the country, day and night we are working to ensure that Ukraine and the world receive truthful information and fight Russian propaganda," one Ukrainian team member involved in the channel's operation tells WIRED. They say the channel was quickly "transformed into a powerful information ecosystem" to keep people informed.</p> <p>The original Covid-19 channel was set up by a Ukrainian technology agency, the Institute of Cognitive Modeling. The government quickly adopted it as the official Telegram pandemic service in March 2020. The agency still operates the channel, as well as an associated Viber account. "We work in conjunction with the government, we publish only verified information," the person familiar with the channel's operation says, adding there are "working groups" for fact checking posts. "If the information does not come from government agencies, we will definitely check it with several official sources in parallel before publishing it," the person says. Those working on the channel do so on schedules, and there is a "hierarchy of approval" that posts need to go through before they go live.</p> <p>While Ukrainian officials have effectively used Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, among others, to share war updates, boost morale, and draw international attention to Ukraine, the use of Telegram</p>

stands out. The app's hybrid structure makes it a powerful tool for mass communications. Public or private channels, such as UkraineNOW, can have an unlimited number of members, while public and private groups allow up to 200,000 members. WhatsApp's maximum group size is 256 members, while Signal groups top out at 1,000 people.

UkraineNOW is not alone. Telegram channels across Ukraine—from news organizations, political commentators, and bloggers—have all [grown in recent days](#), many of them through extensively posting about the war. Some of those growing the fastest, though, belong to official government channels.

Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy; the mayor of Kyiv, former heavyweight boxing champion Vitali Klitschko; and digital minister Mykhailo Fedorov all have large Telegram channels with hundreds of thousands of members. Zelenskyy's channel had 65,000 subscribers on February 23; now it has more than 1.2 million, according to [one Telegram analytics website](#). Government departments and the parliament, known as the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, have all shared hundreds of messages about the war.

As well as promoting official messaging, Ukraine's government has also used Telegram to call for help from its citizens. Fedorov formed a government-backed ["IT Army" of volunteer hackers](#) using Telegram; more than 200,000 people have signed up. People can send the government photos of suspicious symbols being left on roads and buildings—["such attacks by saboteurs can be everywhere"](#)—and [photos of Russian troops or military equipment](#) through Telegram bots.

Fedorov has also used his Telegram channel to share letters addressed to the CEOs of Meta, Google, YouTube, Netflix, and Apple. He asked the companies to restrict their services in Russia and crack down on the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Many of them, [including Apple, have complied](#) to some extent.

While [Telegram has become a vital tool for pro-democracy protests around the world, it has also hosted conspiracy theories and propaganda](#) due to minimal content moderation. The Ukrainian government has warned of messages flooding social media trying to [damage people's morale](#), including accounts asking ["how to get to Kyiv"](#) and [debunked claims that mobile and internet connectivity may be turned off](#). "Russian information terrorists broadcast a picture of an alternative reality," the Ukrainian Center of Combating Disinformation [posted on its Telegram channel](#).

"Since Russia invaded, many of the claims focus on portraying Ukrainian forces as weak or that they are in retreat, have been defeated, or that Russian forces are de-Nazifying Ukraine," says Ciaran O'Connor, a disinformation analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. The Russian-state backed broadcaster RT and its editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan have prominent Telegram channels. "They aim to confuse and obfuscate the factual details of the conflict and attempt to sway public opinion towards Russia and Putin."

Pavel Durov, Telegram's Russian founder, rarely intervenes on the app's controversies but has posted about the war. "Telegram channels are increasingly becoming a source of unverified information related to Ukrainian events," Durov [posted on Telegram on February 27](#). "We do not have the physical ability to check all channel publications for accuracy." Durov considered "partially or completely restricting" Telegram in both Russia and Ukraine—although [quickly backtracked](#) after being told it was a key way people are communicating.

The widespread use of Telegram has provoked some security concerns; unlike WhatsApp and Signal, Telegram doesn't use end-to-end encryption by default. It is only available in specific "secret chats." Signal founder Moxie Marlinspike [warned of the potential for snooping on Telegram on February 25](#). According to internet infrastructure firm Cloudflare, Signal has seen increased traffic in both Russia and Ukraine since the war started. On February 28, Signal traffic in the region passed Telegram [for the first time](#) during the conflict. But while the use of Signal has increased, Cloudflare's data shows there's been no drop in demand for Telegram, suggesting people are using it to keep up to date with the rapidly unfolding events.

	<p>That's likely because the platform has proven effective when the Ukrainian government needs to publish official messaging to thousands of people at once. Millions of people in Ukraine already use Telegram, and the channel infrastructure is already in place to broadcast messages. "What counts is the ability to reach the population with key information," says Lukasz Olejnik, an independent cybersecurity researcher and consultant who previously acted as a cyberwarfare adviser at the International Committee of the Red Cross.</p> <p>There are still possible consequences for individuals using Telegram: People organizing their movements or who are involved in the conflict are more at risk if they don't use encrypted conversations. "This is a big problem for the more active individuals like those being involved in civil defense, or insurgency, armed opposition," Olejnik says. "Such people should better be trained in safe communication methods." While the IT Army is coordinating its public orders on Telegram, for instance, the decisionmakers picking targets use encrypted messaging.</p> <p>As Russian troops move closer to Kyiv and Vladimir Putin escalates his attacks, the UkraineNOW Telegram channel keeps publishing. The Institute of Cognitive Modeling has recruited more than 40 volunteers, on top of its usual staff, to help run the channel. It is also expanding its efforts. On February 27, the channel's organizers created German, French, English, Italian, Spanish, and Polish language versions to make sure the world can read about Russia's actions.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Ukraine vital tech industry carries on
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraines-vital-tech-industry-carries-on-amid-russian-invasion-11646247631
GIST	<p>Amid an increasingly violent Russian invasion, Ukraine's long-vibrant software sector is managing to churn out code for clients overseas and help the country's war effort.</p> <p>Nearly a week after Russia began its broad invasion of Ukraine, many companies in the country's large information-technology outsourcing industry say they have managed to relocate thousands of employees to the country's west, particularly the tech hub of Lviv, which has so far been spared much of the combat and damage.</p> <p>Some companies hired buses and arranged temporary housing for employees and their families who wanted to leave their homes. Others raced to move people out of the country, often to Poland, but found those plans limited when Ukraine closed the border to men between the ages of 18 and 60. That policy meant most of the employees in the male-dominated industry had to stay in Ukraine—though many sent their families ahead without them.</p> <p>Many Ukrainian developers are volunteering time for the country's ad hoc hacking army that has launched cyberattacks against Russia, several Ukrainian tech executives said. Others are working from home or the office to keep their firms largely up and running. Some companies are motivating workers by donating company revenue to the war effort, or reassigning people to volunteer work sourcing military supplies. Several have turned parts of their offices into housing for refugees.</p> <p>"We continuously have these airstrike signals that something might happen, and people have to go to their shelters," said Andrew Pavliv, chief executive of N-iX, a software-development company of nearly 2,000 employees with its biggest office in Lviv. But Mr. Pavliv says his company will deliver about 70% of promised services this week to its clients, which he says are largely in the U.S. and Europe.</p> <p>"Your work is your escape zone and you try to not read the news," Mr. Pavliv said.</p> <p>The scale of Russia's invasion took most of the country's tech industry by surprise, raising the specter of bottlenecks in portions of a global tech ecosystem that is already suffering from a talent shortage. Thousands of companies large and small use contractors in Ukraine to do programming and development work. While a smaller information-technology outsourcing destination than India, Ukraine is one of the biggest in Europe, according to Ukrainian tech industry executives and trade groups.</p>

“There is a serious talent crunch in IT, especially at the higher end where Ukraine was increasingly going,” said Bhaskar Chakravorti, dean of global business at Tufts University’s Fletcher School. “It’s hard to imagine there will be too many other places for clients to go.”

Lviv, a city of 721,000 residents with a historic center, has so far been a key part of Ukrainian tech’s resilience. The city hasn’t seen heavy Russian attacks like those in Kyiv or Kharkiv, but is witness to their impact as a transit point for some refugees heading to Poland, some 40 miles away.

Most tech companies in Lviv are working, said Stepan Veselovskyi, head of the Lviv IT Cluster, a trade group representing some 200 of the roughly 500 tech companies with offices in the city. “It’s important for businesses with international clients to be alive and pay taxes and pay salaries to people in a time of war,” said Mr. Veselovskyi, adding that he held a supervisory board meeting in a basement. “It’s a crazy thing.”

Before the invasion companies said their plans involved largely moving employees from higher-risk areas to Lviv and other western cities. Some said they had started activating contingency plans to rent out apartments for employees who wished to relocate temporarily, joining the roughly 30,000 tech workers who already live and work in the area.

Then the bombs started falling.

Some Ukrainians stayed put, spending nights in metro stations or bomb shelters. Some left their cities, sometimes to weekend homes, others heading further away.

Ilia Podavalkin, who runs Scalamandra, a software-development company of some 20 staff, said a couple of his employees were overseas when the war started but most of the rest have settled in small cities on the Slovak, Polish and Hungarian borders. One employee from Kyiv was out of touch for four days but finally wrote to say he was alive.

“I never thought that I could be in this situation,” Mr. Podavalkin said.

In the intervening days, Mr. Podavalkin said, his panic turned to anger and resolve. He said roughly 60% of his employees were working half days currently, with some joining the country’s cyberattacks. “Our company understands that our economy must be as strong as possible and it is impossible to stop working,” Mr. Podavalkin said. “It is also terrible to be without work and money in wartime.”

Viktor Chekh, chief executive and co-founder of Sombra Inc., a software-engineering company with more than 200 employees in Ukraine, said he has switched his sales employees to volunteer work with the war effort while developers focus on shipping code for clients.

“We need to work to produce revenue, and all of the revenue we produce we can send to the army,” Mr. Chekh said.

SoftServe, one of Ukraine’s biggest tech outsourcing companies, has relocated around 2,000 of its Ukraine-based employees, roughly half to the country’s west, and the rest to Poland and Bulgaria, said Chris Baker, its U.S.-based chief executive. As of Wednesday afternoon, the company had closed only its office in Kharkiv for safety reasons, he said. “The spirit and boundless energy of Ukrainians have kept our delivery teams going,” Mr. Baker said.

Some in Ukraine’s tech industry executives are worried that the understanding and support they currently have from foreign clients who aren’t getting full service won’t last forever. Some also say they are preparing more dire contingency plans to move all employees out of Ukraine to neighboring countries if Russia ends up controlling much of the country.

“I don’t want to speak about it,” said Mr. Pavliv of N-iX. “In the worst-case scenario, if Ukraine is occupied, people will move out. We really hope it will not happen.”

HEADLINE	03/02 AGs probe: harms of TikTok on the young
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2022/mar/02/tiktok-us-launches-investigation-harms-young-people
GIST	<p>A bipartisan group of attorneys general are launching an investigation into whether TikTok is designed and promoted in a “manner that causes or exacerbates physical and mental health harms” for children and young people.</p> <p>Led by the Massachusetts attorney general, Maura Healy, the regulators are investigating whether the company violated consumer protection laws or put the public at risk.</p> <p>“As children and teens already grapple with issues of anxiety, social pressure, and depression, we cannot allow social media to further harm their physical health and mental wellbeing,” Healey said in a news release on Wednesday.</p> <p>The investigation will look into whether TikTok usage causes harms to young people and whether the company knew about those harms, according to the release announcing the investigation. “The investigation focuses, among other things, on the methods and techniques utilized by TikTok to boost young user engagement, including increasing the duration of time spent on the platform and frequency of engagement with the platform,” the release said.</p> <p>There’s precedent for the regulators’ concerns. Last year, a group of attorneys general took aim at Facebook’s handling of its younger users and urged the company to abandon its plan to roll out an Instagram service for kids. In September 2021, the Wall Street Journal revealed that Facebook’s internal research concluded Instagram could cause anxiety, depression and body image issues, particularly in teen girls.</p> <p>“State attorneys general have an imperative to protect young people and seek more information about how companies like TikTok are influencing their daily lives,” Healy added.</p> <p>In a statement, a TikTok spokesperson, Ben Rathe, responded to the investigation by saying: “We care deeply about building an experience that helps to protect and support the wellbeing of our community, and appreciate that the state attorneys general are focusing on the safety of younger users. We look forward to providing information on the many safety and privacy protections we have for teens.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Top 10 Russia-Ukraine ‘war myths’
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/russia-ukraine-conflict-top-10-war-myths-newsguard
GIST	<p>Untrue claims about genocide and authorities in Kyiv supporting nazism are among the most common falsehoods pushed online amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, according to analysis.</p> <p>NewsGuard, a US-based organisation monitoring the trustworthiness of news and information websites, said Russian state media sources are being joined by lesser known sites in pushing deceptive narratives.</p> <p>It published a top 10 Russia-Ukraine “war myths” including an “attack” on a chemical plant in eastern Ukraine and claiming legitimacy for the 2014 referendum on Crimea joining Russia.</p> <p>The warning came as Facebook and Instagram said on Monday they were blocking access to the Russian state media outlets RT and Sputnik across the EU. TikTok has followed suit, while YouTube has blocked the broadcasters on its platform in the UK and Europe and Twitter indicated it would block RT and Sputnik in the EU.</p> <p>NewsGuard said it had identified and is tracking 114 web domains including Russian state media sources such as RT, Sputnik and Tass but warned that websites with no direct links to the Kremlin are pushing false content on mainstream social media platforms.</p>

“Russia employs a multilayered strategy to introduce, amplify, and spread false and distorted narratives across the world – relying on a mix of official state media sources, anonymous websites and accounts, and other methods to distribute propaganda that advances the Kremlin’s interests and undermines its adversaries,” the analysis said.

“Its government-funded and operated websites use digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok to launch and promote false narratives.”

NewsGuard said the outlets pushing disinformation included anonymous websites, foundations and research websites with indeterminate funding.

The major social media platforms have said they are on alert for disinformation linked to the Russian invasion. The owner of Facebook and Instagram, Meta, has launched a “special operations centre” to monitor content related to the week-long conflict, while Twitter said it has suspended more than a dozen accounts that originated in Russia. YouTube and TikTok have also said they are closely monitoring content related to the conflict.

These are NewsGuard’s top 10 Russia-Ukraine “war myths” – followed by NewsGuard’s refutation:

1. “Russian-speaking residents in the Donbas region of Ukraine have been subjected to genocide.” *The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe has found no evidence of this.*
2. “Polish-speaking saboteurs attempted to bomb a chlorine plant in Donbas.” *The video of the “attack”, for which there is no evidence, was recorded days before it is alleged to have taken place.*
3. “Ukrainian forces bombed a kindergarten in Luhansk, eastern Ukraine, on 17 February 2022.” *The shelling came from Russian-separatist frontlines.*
4. “Russia did not target civilian infrastructure in Ukraine at the start of invasion.” *One day after the invasion, Amnesty International documented at least three Russian military attacks on civilian areas in Ukraine.*
5. “Nazism is rampant in Ukrainian politics and society, supported by authorities in Kyiv.” *The candidate for the far-right nationalist party, Svoboda, won 1.6% of the vote in the 2019 presidential election.*
6. “The west staged a coup to overthrow the pro-Russia Ukrainian government in 2014.” *There is no evidence supporting the theory that the 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine was a coup orchestrated by western countries.*
7. “The US has a network of bioweapons labs in eastern Europe.” *The claims are based on a misrepresentation of the US Department of Defense’s [Biological Threat Reduction Program](#).*
8. “Nato has a military base in Odesa, southern Ukraine.” *Foreign military bases are not permitted in Ukraine.*
9. “Crimea joined Russia legally.” *The UN Assembly declared a 2014 referendum that backed Crimea joining Russia was illegitimate.*
10. “Modern Ukraine was entirely created by communist Russia.” *Russia and Ukraine’s shared heritage dates back more than 1,000 years.*

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HEADLINE	03/02 Bitcoin safe haven in geopolitical tension?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/2/bitcoin-again-viewed-as-safe-haven-amid-geopolitic/
GIST	<p>SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — Bitcoin prices have surged as investors again appear to view the volatile cryptocurrency as a safe haven for their money and Russians and Ukrainians seek alternatives to their country’s financial institutions.</p> <p>After initially falling to around \$34,000 following Russia’s advance into Ukraine last week, bitcoin pushed about 10% higher on Monday and is now up more than 25% in the past week, to \$43,900 Wednesday afternoon. Other cryptocurrencies have also soared.</p>

Russians are exchanging their rapidly devalued rubles for bitcoin to try and mitigate the impact of the economic sanctions imposed by the international communities for their country's attack on Ukraine. The Ukrainian government has limited its citizens' ability to conduct electronic fund transactions, so Ukrainians are also turning to bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. They're also buying stablecoins whose values are pegged to the U.S. dollar.

Prior to the Russian invasion, bitcoin had been trading in a way similar to other riskier assets such as technology stocks. Investors have been expecting the Federal Reserve to soon begin raising interest rates in response to high inflation. They moved money out of more speculative investments such as bitcoin and bought stocks of banks other industries that tend to perform well when rates are rising.

That changed after the invasion when Western countries responded with a series of steps that limit the ability of Russia's government and the country's oligarchs to access the financial systems. Those moves have spillover effects for Russia's citizens, who have been lining up at banks and ATMs to withdraw money.

Blockchain data and analytics firm Coin Metrics says trading volume in bitcoin in exchange for both rubles and Ukrainian hryvnia has spiked in recent days, but such trading still only represents a small fraction of the overall volume. Translation: investors at large are viewing bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies as a good place to store assets again.

Kyle Waters, a research analyst at Coin Metrics, said crypto trading data confirms that recent geopolitical events have "more generally" increased demand for cryptocurrency, which can be transferred anywhere and without the need for a third party.

"This could go for anyone, and certainly could include everyday Russian and Ukrainian citizens trying to escape a devaluing local currency," Waters said.

Some analysts and media reports have speculated that Russian oligarchs could use cryptocurrencies to avoid sanctions. On Wednesday, the Justice Department said it is creating a task force that would, among other things, try to thwart any efforts to use cryptocurrency to get around sanctions.

Some analysts suggest this bitcoin surge may already be nearing its ceiling as prices for energy jump as the Russia-Ukraine conflict rages. Oil soared to \$111 per barrel Wednesday, its highest level in more than a decade. Bitcoin mining, where computers are used to verify bitcoin transactions, consumes an enormous amount of energy.

"Bitcoin has had a nice run but exhaustion in this rally will likely settle in as surging energy costs will likely impact some mining abroad," said Edward Moya of Oanda in a markets summary report.

In addition to both the heightened regional and broader crypto market activity, millions of dollars worth of cryptocurrency have been donated to Ukraine since the invasion.

Elliptic, a firm that tracks cryptocurrency transactions says \$33.8 million worth of digital currency has been donated to Ukraine's government and non-governmental organizations there since the start of Russia's invasion, nearly a third of it on Tuesday.

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HEADLINE	03/02 WA to use controversial ID.me
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/the-irs-dropped-id-mes-facial-recognition-tech-after-backlash-wa-is-rolling-it-out-in-june/
GIST	Washington state is getting ready to roll out the ID.me facial recognition system dropped by the IRS last month over privacy and equity concerns.

Human rights activists and some federal lawmakers are asking state government officials, including in Washington, to ban the system. Amid the outcry, Washington's Employment Security Department says it doesn't use ID.me to verify the identities of people claiming jobless benefits — but plans to start doing so in June.

“Recently, we launched a competitive procurement process to secure a tool claimants would use to verify their identity before applying for benefits,” said Nick Demerice, director of public affairs. ID.me, Demerice said, was the winning vendor.

Sold as a way to help stop scammers from accessing unemployment aid by adding an extra layer of security, ID.me offers government agencies and other customers a way to verify an individual's identity using information like a driver's license, Social Security number and a facial scan. The system prompts each user to take a “video selfie,” holding the camera in front of their face to scan until they see a green check mark.

ID.me's technology is already used in 27 states' unemployment systems, as well as several federal agencies, including the Social Security Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Four states credited the system with preventing \$210 billion in fraud, ID.me says.

Washington launched a pilot project with ID.me in 2021, part of its efforts to combat a spike in fraud in spring 2020, Demerice said. Washington state officials found [\\$1.6 million in fraudulent claims](#) in March and April of that year, leading them to temporarily halt unemployment benefits.

The state did not implement the ID.me system following the pilot.

Recently, ID.me's facial recognition technology has come under fire for the amount of information it collects from applicants, which opponents of the system worry could be misused, resold or stolen.

Critics also say the system creates barriers that prevent people from accessing unemployment aid. The tech is not accessible to people who don't have smartphones, computers or internet access. Facial recognition technology, they contend, also perpetuates racial biases.

A study from the National Institute of Standards and Technology found this type of tech led to more false positives for Asian and African American faces, compared with white faces, meaning it could have a disproportionate impact on people from marginalized communities through things like wrongful arrests.

Following backlash, the [IRS in February backed off its plan](#) to require anyone who wanted to access tax-related records online to record a video of their face with their computer or smartphone.

Now, activists are turning their attention toward other government agencies relying on ID.me's system.

Even as lawmakers pushed the IRS to drop ID.me for taxpayers, many were silent about the “tens of thousands of people” already impacted by the “discriminatory and harmful technology,” said Caitlin Seeley George, a campaign director for digital rights nonprofit Fight for the Future.

“Many of our communities filing for unemployment across the country have felt demoralized and dehumanized by the ID.me process since the start of the pandemic,” Seeley George continued. “Some were forced to wait for months to receive the lifesaving benefits they earned and helped to pay for. For these people, the dangers and harms of ID.me aren't theoretical — they're reality.”

By the end of February, more than 20,000 people had signed a petition from Fight for the Future and 20 other groups calling for the end of government contracts with ID.me and to launch an investigation into the federal government's use of facial recognition technology.

Sens. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., are pushing the U.S. Department of Labor to help state unemployment programs find a way to verify applicant's identities without relying on private contractors like ID.me.

Nearly 50 organizations signed a letter making a similar call, saying facial recognition technology broadly has been found to be biased and have a disproportionate impact on people of color and other marginalized communities.

The signing groups, which included the Consumer Federation of America, the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, said there isn't enough data about ID.me's performance, including its face-verification failure rate and whether the system disproportionately fails to verify the identities of people of color.

It may also cut off access to jobless benefits for individuals with disabilities, including blindness, or applicants who may not have access to the necessary technology.

Blake Hall, founder and CEO of ID.me, said the system was created to increase access by offering more ways for individuals to verify their identity, particularly for people who do not have credit history, have little banking history, are without a home or who live overseas.

"Tying access to digital services to affluence is fundamentally unjust, and that's been the reality for access to government services in this country for decades," Hall said. "ID.me is the first company that's moved access rates up by untethering it from credit history. That's why I started the company."

Hall says ID.me follows the identity verification standards set by the federal government, and isn't in the business of collecting biometric data from individuals.

In response to concerns over its technology, the software company announced it will now allow users to verify their identity without using automated facial recognition and let them delete some identifiable information, starting March 1.

To safeguard against any bias with its facial recognition tech and speed up the identity verification process, ID.me also plans to introduce a new feature that allows a human to immediately review any individual's verification that failed.

In Washington, Demerice from ESD said the department has "noted the significant concerns raised about using facial recognition technology by ID.me in its work with the IRS."

"We take data security and data privacy very seriously," he said. "We will evaluate all information to ensure we implement this verification tool safely and responsibly. We understand the need to balance the competing priorities of claimant safety, ease of use and fraud prevention."

Demerice said in February the state was still in the process of determining how it would use ID.me, leading to confusion from groups like Fight for the Future and Washington's chapter of the ACLU that believed ESD was already using the system — in part because it was listed on ID.me's website.

ESD asked the company to remove the page that said Washington had "partnered with ID.me to verify claimants requesting benefits and services online," Demerice said.

But the confusion over whether Washingtonians applying for jobless benefits are required to consent to using facial recognition technology is part of the problem with this kind of tech, said Jennifer Lee, the technology and liberty project manager with ACLU of Washington.

"You can't outsource core government functions to a third-party vendor and not tell people how that system works, whether it has biases and even if it is using that system at all," Lee said. "We don't know the extent to which facial recognition technology is being used."

Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	03/02 Taliban search echoes resented US tactics
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-resistance.html
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan — Trucks with heavy machine guns stopped at street corners, unloading men in camouflage carrying radios and assault rifles. Going door to door, they barged into homes, tossed open drawers and pored through cellphones — looking for any connection to an armed insurgency.</p> <p>These soldiers carrying out a cordon and search operation in Afghanistan’s capital were not American troops, who for nearly 20 years conducted similar operations that drove many Afghans into the arms of the Taliban.</p> <p>They were the Taliban.</p> <p>The sweep, which began on Friday, has spanned several provinces and remains underway, is the largest operation of its kind since the Taliban seized power in August and the first carried out in daylight.</p> <p>The searches stoked alarm among many Afghans, some of whom reported mistreatment and property damage by Taliban forces, and offered the latest evidence that the new Taliban, like the old ones, were relying on police-state tactics to assert their authority and stamp out dissent.</p> <p>In recent months, the Taliban have issued restrictions on local media and cracked down on peaceful protests. They have also been accused of detaining female activists and arresting people associated with the former government despite having declared a blanket amnesty.</p> <p>At a news conference on Sunday, the Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, insisted that the recent searches were aimed at rooting out “kidnappers, thieves, evil elements and other criminals.” He also dismissed accusations of misconduct, characterizing the operation as “professional” and “well-planned.”</p> <p>The operation began in areas seen as resistant to Taliban rule and comes ahead of spring, long known as Afghanistan’s “fighting season,” when the Taliban would launch offensives against the previous government.</p> <p>Now, the insurgents-turned-rulers are contending with a reinvigorated threat from the Islamic State affiliate in the east and a budding armed resistance in the north.</p> <p>But the door-to-door searches risk alienating Afghans already reeling from an economic crash and set on edge by the new government’s hard-line Islamist rule.</p> <p>“What the Taliban are doing is counterproductive to what they want to achieve,” said Ibraheem Bahiss, an International Crisis Group consultant. “When it comes to military and policing tactics, the Taliban has been observing and learning from their erstwhile enemy over the past 20 years. Now they are imitating many of those tactics to consolidate control.”</p> <p>The Taliban, he said, “used to capitalize” on these same tactics, when the Americans were doing it, to gain recruits and financing. “Now they’re relying on them to police urban areas.”</p> <p>The search operation began early Friday as dozens of checkpoints spread across Kabul, initially focused on the city’s northern neighborhoods. During the last 20 years, these areas, mainly inhabited by the Tajik minority, often flew the tricolor flag of the Northern Alliance, an insurgent coalition that fought the Taliban government in the 1990s.</p>

Ghulam Farooq Alim, a Kabul resident and university professor, was ready for the Taliban's arrival on Saturday, having been alerted to their approach by his neighbors.

He sent his family to a nearby neighborhood before a group of Talibs arrived, pushing their way into his home. They looked for weapons and other military equipment, and scrutinized the registration papers for his cars, threatening to impound one because he didn't have proper documentation. Next door, at his friend's house, they tore off freshly installed roofing material, finding nothing.

Some residents said that the Taliban forces conducted only cursory searches and reported no damage to property.

But at other homes, mostly in neighborhoods belonging to ethnic minorities, Taliban soldiers broke the locks on front doors, damaged televisions and storage boxes, and destroyed yards by digging for contraband, according to interviews with nearly a dozen Kabul residents.

In a country where privacy is sacred, many saw the home intrusions as an unforgivable offense reminiscent of two decades of foreign occupation.

"People in my neighborhood are talking about joining the resistance in the spring," Mr. Alim said. "They are angry about how the Taliban behave. They are not respecting human dignity by coming to our houses. If we don't have privacy in our homes, we don't have any other option."

The Taliban rarely acknowledges the existence of the resistance forces, often referring to them as "criminals." Still, the new government has committed at least 1,000 more troops in the north, where the resistance is based, and the search operation suggests they are concerned about the possibility of renewed fighting.

The resistance, for now, consists of a smattering of armed fighters spread across some of the most inhospitable mountains of northern Afghanistan, according to interviews with more than a dozen resistance fighters and leaders.

The best-known group is the National Resistance Front, or N.R.F., which was formed in the twilight of Afghanistan's Western-backed government before it collapsed last summer.

The force has an estimated several hundred fighters, many of whom were low-ranking officers in the former government's security forces.

Most are Tajik, an Afghan minority from the northern provinces once home to the Northern Alliance, and the group's leader, Ahmad Massoud, is the son of the deceased Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud. Mr. Massoud left the country after the Taliban seized power and has led the N.R.F. from abroad.

The group has limited resources, no significant public backing from foreign governments, and no clear chain of command, according to N.R.F. fighters and leaders in Afghanistan.

"So far, we have not received equipment and supplies," said a commander, Maj. Sediqulla Shuja, 29. "The promise has been made by the leadership of the N.R.F., but it has not arrived yet. We still spend from our own pocket."

Still, even with infrequent deliveries of supplies, the group has carried out more than 100 hit-and-run attacks, mostly on Taliban checkpoints and outposts in the country's north, according to data compiled by ACLED, a data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project.

But misinformation is rampant and claims about the group's success and setbacks are difficult to assess.

The Taliban search operation is led by Mullah Fazel Mazloom, the acting deputy defense minister and a well-known Taliban commander who had been imprisoned by the United States at Guantánamo. Mr. Fazel

was accused of leading the Taliban's scorched-earth campaign in the 1990s, where orchards, homes and fields were destroyed as he pursued the very militias the group is now again trying to stamp out.

Reaction to the search operation in Kabul has broken largely along ethnic lines. Some residents — mostly Pashtuns — are thankful that the Taliban are taking a hard stance against criminality, a policy the Taliban has long been known for.

But members of ethnic minorities have accused the Taliban of targeting them for their ethnicity, adding to their resentment of an interim government that, like the Taliban itself, is composed mostly of southern Pashtuns.

Taliban officials have denied those claims.

"Our operations are not against a specific ethnic group," Mr. Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, said on Sunday. "Our operations are a reason for people to support us, not a reason to stand against us."

Taliban officials also downplayed complaints about the invasion of privacy, citing their cooperation with neighborhood elders, a sign of respect, and using female officers to search women. But this approach has played out unevenly across Kabul, with some residents interviewed by The New York Times noting that no women or local elders were present when the Taliban arrived and forced their way inside.

Hamid, 31, woke up Friday morning in northern Kabul to his mother yelling that the Taliban were at the door. About a dozen Talibs entered his home soon after, placing him in handcuffs before releasing him several hours later.

That night, over dinner, Hamid's younger brother announced that he would join the resistance.

"In my neighborhood I think there are two types of people," said Hamid, who asked to be identified by only his first name out of fear of retribution. "Some will want to join because they don't want to live like this. The others are educated, like me, and they don't want war anymore. Even if the resistance comes to Kabul, there will be nothing. There will be war and we will lose everything."

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HEADLINE	03/02 DOJ: Ericsson possible payments to ISIS
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/02/doj-ericsson-iraq-isis/
GIST	<p>The Justice Department has accused telecommunications giant Ericsson of violating a billion-dollar legal settlement by failing to fully disclose evidence of alleged corruption and possible payments to terrorists in Iraq, the company said Wednesday.</p> <p>The revelation raises substantial legal risks for the Swedish company, including the possibility of steep fines or a new criminal investigation three years after Ericsson paid more than \$1 billion to avoid prosecution in other cases.</p> <p>The disclosure came three days after The Washington Post and other news organizations published details of an internal Ericsson probe that had uncovered evidence of extensive fraud by company officials, decisions to send workers into territory controlled by terrorists and the use of contractors who may have paid off Islamic State militants.</p> <p>A report on the findings of an internal probe was obtained by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists and shared with The Post as part of an international reporting project.</p> <p>In a statement posted on its website, Ericsson said that it had been notified by the Justice Department on Tuesday that its disclosures to U.S. investigators on the Iraq matter had been "insufficient" and that the company had "breached" terms of its 2019 settlement with the U.S. government.</p>

Shares of Ericsson stock plunged 13 percent in value after the release, marking the latest in a series of sharp declines for a company that [analysts at Citibank wrote earlier in the week had risked becoming “uninvestible.”](#)

The fallout is related to the conclusions of an internal investigation that Ericsson completed in 2019 that found the company had engaged in “bribes and kickbacks” and other fraud over nearly a decade as it pursued contracts in Iraq that generated revenue of nearly \$2 billion.

The internal report, based on interviews with employees and a review of millions of emails and other documents, also uncovered disturbing details about Ericsson’s decisions to send workers into areas overrun by Islamic State fighters.

The company continued to do so even after an engineer was kidnapped in 2014, making exorbitant cash payments to a cargo company that bypassed customs officials by “passing through ISIS controlled territories,” according to company investigators.

Ultimately, investigators said “it cannot be excluded” that Ericsson had contributed to “the illicit financing of terrorism.”

In a conference call with reporters and market analysts Wednesday, Ericsson President and chief executive Börje Ekholm repeated the company’s assertion that it found no evidence of direct involvement by Ericsson employees in any payments to the Islamic State.

“The question on financing armed factions cannot be substantiated,” Ekholm said.

Ekholm described the findings in the internal probe as “hugely embarrassing and hugely unsatisfactory” but did not comment on what the company had failed to share with the Justice Department.

Officials at the Justice Department declined to comment.

“We do cooperate fully with the U.S. authorities,” Ekholm said. “Now we have a breach notice, so we need of course to make improvements and to change.”

He said that the company has taken steps to strengthen compliance efforts, improving investigative mechanisms and encouraging employees to speak up where wrongdoing arises. But he declined to answer a question about why staff named in the internal report remained at the company or had been promoted.

The Justice Department notice marks the second time that Ericsson has been found in breach of a deferred prosecution agreement in which it admitted to widespread fraud in China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Kuwait and Djibouti.

Ericsson is one of the world’s leading makers of the sophisticated radio towers, switches and other gear used in cellular communications networks. The Swedish firm is regarded by Western governments as a crucial alternative to Huawei, a Chinese company whose devices have been banned by the United States and other countries over suspicions that they are rigged to enable Chinese espionage.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Philippines: raid killed IS-linked militants
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/philippines-militants-killed-bombs-seized-recent-raid-83223518
GIST	MARAWI, Philippines -- Philippine troops killed at least seven Muslim insurgents aligned with the Islamic State group in a recent offensive in the south and recovered 45 heavy firearms and several bombs and land mines that were to be used in future attacks, military officials said Thursday.

About 60 Muslim militants were in the remote camp near Maguing in Lanao del Sur province when it was attacked Tuesday by fighter jets and army forces, military officials said. It was not immediately clear whether their leader, Abu Zacariah, was among those killed or managed to escape. One soldier was killed and five others were wounded in the fighting, the officials said.

Zacariah has been implicated in past attacks and bombings and is suspected of being the newly designated leader of the Islamic State group in Southeast Asia, said army infantry brigade commander Brig. Gen. Jose Maria Cuerpo II, who oversaw Tuesday's offensive.

Two factions of the militant group Daulah Islamiyah, linked to the Islamic State group, appear to have merged and camped near Maguing in January. At the time, some power transmission towers in the region were bombed in attacks claimed by the Islamic State group, prompting the military to intensify its surveillance and prepare for an offensive, Cuerpo said.

"The troops were ready to attack but they assessed it would be difficult to storm the encampment, which was protected by heavy weapons," Cuerpo told reporters. He said that prompted him to first launch airstrikes against the insurgents.

Air force fighter jets dropped a dozen bombs, then army troops launched a ground attack and overran the camp. The insurgents fled in different directions and were pursued by troops, military officials said.

The military denied reports that the troops encountered guerrillas belonging to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the largest Muslim rebel group which signed a peace pact with the government in 2014 and is now helping govern a Muslim autonomous region in the south.

"We'd like to assure our partners in the MILF that we respect the peace accord," military spokesman Col. Ramon Zagala said. "We are on track and we're only targeting the peace spoilers."

Daulah Islamiyah members were involved in the 2017 siege of Marawi, a southern Islamic city where hundreds of militants waving Islamic State group-style black flags occupied commercial buildings and villages and took hostages. Filipino troops, backed by U.S. and Australian surveillance aircraft, quelled the five-month siege, which left about 1,200 people dead — mostly militants — and destroyed the mosque-studded city's commercial center and outlying residential communities.

The military has been launching offensives against small armed groups allied with the militants who laid siege on Marawi, including the Abu Sayyaf, which has been blacklisted by the U.S. and the Philippines for past bombings, ransom kidnappings and beheadings in the south of the largely Roman Catholic country.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	03/02 UN historic resolution at plastic pollution
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2022/03/02/un-adopts-historic-resolution-aimed-ending-plastic-pollution/
GIST	<p>For the first time, the international community has agreed on a framework to curb the world's growing plastic problem. A resolution adopted Wednesday by the United Nations lays out an ambitious plan for developing a legally binding treaty to "end plastic pollution."</p> <p>"With plastic pollution getting worse every day, there is no time to waste," said Rwandan Environment Minister Jeanne d'Arc Mujawamariya. "This decision is a historic milestone in the global effort to prevent our planet from drowning in plastics."</p>

Wednesday's resolution came on the third day of the biennial U.N. Environment Assembly in Nairobi, where more than 150 countries are represented. It calls for the creation of an intergovernmental negotiating committee to hash out details of a treaty by the end of 2024.

"This is just an amazing show of what the world can do when we work together," said U.S. delegate Monica Medina, the assistant secretary of state for oceans and international environmental and scientific affairs. Choking back tears, she added, "It is the beginning of the end of the scourge of plastic on this planet. ... I think we will look back on this as a day for our children and grandchildren."

The committee's mandate includes all phases of the plastic life cycle — from design and production to waste management. It comes at a time when the world produces billions of pounds of plastic waste annually — about 353 million tons in 2019, according to a recent report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and amid mounting scientific concerns about issues such as marine plastic debris and the potential impact of microplastics.

Millions of tons of plastic end up in the oceans each year, leading to alarming images of turtles and other wildlife caught in the waste. Even Mount Everest has not escaped microplastics pollution. The United States contributes most to this deluge, according to a National Academy of Sciences study, generating about 287 pounds of plastics per person.

"The high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution represent a serious environmental problem at a global scale," noted the U.N. resolution, which also acknowledged "the urgent need to strengthen global coordination, cooperation and governance to take immediate actions toward the long-term elimination of plastic pollution."

Some countries, states and municipalities have taken action to curb plastic waste. Rwanda, for instance, has had a ban on plastic bags for more than a decade. In the United States, Sens. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) have led congressional efforts on plastic pollution, including the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act, which President Donald Trump signed into law in 2020. But this latest move is the most concerted international effort yet to tackle the problem of plastic pollution.

Environmental activists and industry representatives alike welcomed the agreement. "It has all the critical components we thought were necessary at this stage in the process," said Erin Simon, the head of plastic waste and business at the World Wildlife Fund. In a statement, the International Council of Chemical Associations, a trade association, wrote, "We commend the governments that spent long days finding common ground to develop a meaningful resolution to address plastic pollution."

The U.N. resolution was years in the making, said David Azoulay, a lawyer at the Center for International Environmental Law. He says he remembers the idea first surfacing at the 2016 iteration of the U.N. Environment Assembly in the context of marine plastic. "Envisioning a treaty was unthinkable," Azoulay said. But, he added, Wednesday's resolution has gone even beyond that early focus.

"The issue is not just plastic in the ocean; the issue is plastic pollution throughout its life cycle," Azoulay said. "There is very little in there that I wish wasn't in there. Everything we need to have the conversations that will lead to a good treaty is in there."

Azoulay was glad that among the achievements in the resolution, its final version specifically charged the negotiating committee with looking at plastic production, included the option for a dedicated fund to help finance the treaty and mentioned human health impacts of plastic pollution.

"There were efforts to weaken the language on health that failed," said Bjorn Beeler, the international coordinator at the International Pollutants Elimination Network, an advocacy and research group. Although he said he would have liked a more explicit mention of the chemical additives in plastics, that language was "negotiated out." An aspect about which Simon is excited is the call for national action

	<p>plans from each participating country. More harmonized and standard data is “critical,” she said but acknowledged that “the proof is in the action we take from here on out.”</p> <p>Getting from resolution to treaty will not be easy. “The fact that they are headed toward binding rules I take as a very good sign,” said Steven Blackledge, who runs the conservation program at the nonprofit group Environment America. “The devil is in the details.”</p> <p>The U.N. negotiating committee will have a multitude of specifics to wade through in a relatively short time. Among the many items, any treaty will have to tackle reporting standards, financing mechanisms and, perhaps the thorniest issue, plastic production. “The million-dollar question is how much we’ll talk about reducing the production of virgin plastic,” Azoulay said.</p> <p>That topic is likely to prove contentious. Ahead of the conference, Joshua Baca, the vice president for plastics at the American Chemistry Council, the trade association for chemicals manufacturers, called restricting and regulating the production of plastic “a very shortsighted approach.”</p> <p>With such major hurdles left to clear, Beeler said he is skeptical that the timeline will hold. “As you get into it, it’s going to be a monster. I don’t fathom how you can get a deal within two years,” he said. “This is meaningful; this is significant. But this is really the first step.”</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Mystery: some people do not catch Covid
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/scientists-seek-to-solve-mystery-of-why-some-people-do-not-catch-covid
GIST	<p>Phoebe Garrett has attended university lectures without catching Covid; she even hosted a party where everyone subsequently tested positive except her. “I think I’ve knowingly been exposed about four times,” the 22-year-old from High Wycombe said.</p> <p>In March 2021, she participated in the world’s first Covid-19 challenge trial, which involved dripping live virus into her nose and pegging her nostrils shut for several hours, in a deliberate effort to infect her. Still her body resisted.</p> <p>“We had multiple rounds of tests, and different methods of testing: throat swabs, nose swabs, other types of swabs that I’d never done before like nasal wicks – where you hold a swab in your nose for a minute – as well as blood tests, but I never developed symptoms, never tested positive,” Garrett said. “My mum has always said that our family never gets flu, and I’ve wondered if there’s maybe something behind that.”</p> <p>Most people know someone who has stubbornly resisted catching Covid, despite everyone around them falling sick. Precisely how they do this remains a mystery, but scientists are beginning to find some clues.</p> <p>The hope is that identifying these mechanisms could lead to the development of drugs that not only protect people from catching Covid, but also prevent them from passing it on.</p> <p>Garrett is not the only challenge trial participant to have avoided becoming infected. Of the 34 who were exposed to the virus, 16 failed to develop an infection (defined as two consecutive positive PCR tests) – although around half of them transiently tested positive for low levels of the virus, often several days after exposure.</p> <p>Possibly, this was a reflection of the immune system rapidly shutting down an embryonic infection. “In our previous studies with other viruses, we have seen early immune responses in the nose that are associated with resisting infection,” said Prof Christopher Chiu at Imperial College London, who led the study. “Together, these findings imply that there is a struggle between the virus and host, which in our ‘uninfected’ participants results in prevention of infection taking off.”</p>

Some of them also reported some mild symptoms, such as a stuffy nose, sore throat, tiredness, or headache – although, since these commonly occur in everyday life, they may have been unrelated to virus exposure.

“Either way, levels of the virus didn’t climb high enough to trigger detectable levels of antibodies, T cells or inflammatory factors in the blood that are usually associated with symptoms,” Chiu said.

Other studies also suggest it is possible to shake off Covid during the earliest stages of infection, before it establishes a proper foothold. For instance, during the first wave of the pandemic, Dr Leo Swadling at University College London and colleagues intensively monitored a group of healthcare workers who were regularly exposed to infected patients, but who never tested positive or developed antibodies themselves. Blood tests revealed that around 15% of them had T cells reactive against Sars-CoV-2, plus other markers of viral infection.

Possibly, [memory T-cells](#) from previous coronavirus infections – ie those responsible for common colds – cross-reacted with the new coronavirus and protected them from Covid.

Understanding how frequently people abort nascent Covid infections in the era of Omicron is complicated because it requires intensive testing – for the virus, antibodies, T cells and other markers of infection – and because so many people have been vaccinated.

“It is likely vaccinated individuals are exposed to the virus, and block viral replication and detectable infection more commonly,” Swadling said.

There is also no commercially available test that can distinguish between immunity triggered by vaccination and the different variants – so unless a person has recently tested positive, it is almost impossible to know if they have been exposed to Omicron or not.

Seasonal coronaviruses may not be the only source of cross-protective immune responses. Prof Cecilia Söderberg-Nauclér, an immunologist at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, began investigating this possibility, after Sweden avoided being overwhelmed by cases during the pandemic’s first wave, despite its [light-touch](#) approach to restrictions. Mathematical modelling by her colleague, Marcus Carlsson at Lund University, suggested this pattern of infections could only be explained if a large proportion of people had some kind of protective immunity.

Her team scoured databases of protein sequences from existing viruses, hunting for small segments (peptides) resembling those from the new coronavirus, to which antibodies were likely to bind. When they identified a six-amino acid peptide in a protein from H1N1 influenza that matched a crucial part of the coronavirus spike protein, “I almost fell out of my chair,” Söderberg-Nauclér said.

They have since discovered antibodies to this peptide in up to 68% of blood donors from Stockholm. The [research](#), which has not yet been peer-reviewed, could suggest that immune responses triggered by H1N1 influenza – which was responsible for the 2009-10 [swine flu pandemic](#) – and possibly related subsequent strains, may equip people with partial, though not complete, protection against Covid-19. “It provides a cushion, but it won’t protect you if an infected person coughs in your face,” Söderberg-Nauclér said.

A small proportion of people may even be genetically resistant to Covid-19. In October, an international consortium of researchers launched a [global hunt](#) to find some of them, in the hope of identifying protective genes.

“We are not looking for common gene variants that provide modest protection against infection, what we are looking for is potentially very rare gene variants that completely protect someone against infection,” said Prof András Spaan at the Rockefeller University in New York, who is leading the research.

They are particularly interested in people who shared a home and bed with an infected person, and avoided infection themselves. “For instance, the other day I was talking to an elderly lady from the Netherlands,

who took care of her husband during the first wave. The husband was eventually admitted to the ICU, but she spent the week before taking care of him, sharing the same room, and without access to face masks,” said Spaan. “We cannot explain why she did not get infected.”

Such resistance is known to exist for other diseases, including HIV, [malaria](#), and [norovirus](#). In these cases, a genetic defect means some people lack a receptor used by the pathogen to enter cells, so they cannot be infected. “It could well be that, in some individuals, there is such a defect in a receptor used by Sars-CoV-2,” Spaan said.

Identifying such genes could lead to the development of new treatments for Covid-19, in the same way that the identification of [CCR5 receptor](#) defects in HIV-resistant people has led to [new ways of treating HIV](#).

Spaan thinks it is unlikely that the majority of those who have avoided Covid are genetically resistant, even if they have some partial immune protection. This means there is no guarantee they will not eventually become infected – as Garrett found out in late January. Having dodged the virus for almost two years, she was shocked when a routine lateral flow test produced an ominous second red line. Shortly afterwards, she developed mild Covid symptoms, but has since recovered.

The irony is that, having avoided catching Covid from close family, friends and in a specialist medical laboratory, it was probably a relative stranger who infected her. “I have no idea where I got it from; it could have been someone in my local choir, or maybe from the gym,” she said.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	03/02 Gang wars, violence shock Ecuador
SOURCE	https://news.yahoo.com/mutilated-bodies-gang-wars-shock-022255075.html
GIST	<p>A headless body discarded in the street. Two corpses dangling from a bridge. An intensifying drug war has shocked once-peaceful Ecuador with scenes of horrific violence.</p> <p>Experts say the two crimes committed within a single week last month evoked the savage methods of Mexican narco gangs which, according to the government in Quito, has infiltrated the South American country of 17.7 million people.</p> <p>"The cruelty is something new," Daniel Ponton, dean of the security and defense school at Ecuador's IAEN university told AFP. He blamed "emulation" by local criminals of the well-documented atrocities committed by drug lords in Mexico or Colombia.</p> <p>The local gangs soon learn, he added, that "violence has a value in itself" as a tool "to intimidate rival criminal gangs (and) diminish the will of the State... and the general population" to fight crime.</p> <p>Wedge between Colombia and Peru -- the world's largest cocaine producers -- Ecuador long managed to escape drug violence even as the illegal but lucrative trade started showing benefits for its economy and domestic consumption grew.</p> <p>The country used to be a drug transit and storage point favored by foreign traffickers for its porous borders, dollarized economy and major Pacific seaports for export.</p> <p>But the ports -- especially at Guayaquil -- have since become battlegrounds themselves as the presence of local gangs has exploded, and murder figures with it.</p> <p>- 'Super-violent messages' -</p>

In January and February this year, 468 people were killed in Ecuador -- 277 more than in the same two months of last year.

More than 320 of this year's victims have been inmates -- many dismembered and burnt in grisly wars between rival prison gangs allied to drug cartels beyond Ecuador's borders.

In 2021, the country recorded a rate of 14 murders per 100,000 inhabitants -- nearly double the 2020 figure, though still not among the highest in the world.

Especially hard hit is Guayaquil, a city of 2.8 million people home to Ecuador's main commercial port, and the violence is increasingly filtering through to the streets.

On February 20, residents of Guayaquil were shocked when the body of a 21-year-old man was thrown from a moving vehicle in a city street, followed by his severed head.

Six days earlier, in the nearby town of Duran, the bodies of two men were found handcuffed and hanging from a pedestrian bridge.

Since late last year, five decapitated bodies have been found in Duran and Guayaquil, authorities say, and last month a head was found stuffed in a backpack at the port of Puerto Bolivar to the south.

There have also been neighborhood shootouts, a previously alien phenomenon.

"Drug trafficking has gained ground in Ecuadorian society," President Guillermo Lasso said last month after the latest bodies were so publicly displayed.

He blamed previous governments for allowing "microtrafficking" to find a foothold in the country, only to be swiftly followed by gangs and their territorial disputes.

For Renato Rivera, a researcher at the Latin American Network for Analysis of Security and Organized Crime, the mutilated corpses were meant as "super-violent messages" of warning.

The victims are often killed as punishment for being short on a drug delivery -- possibly after police seizures -- while at the same time serving as "a message of intimidation for rivals," he added.

- 'Weakened' state -

Faced with the expanding violence, Lasso's government recently ordered troops to Guayaquil to retake control of the city and "prevent the entry of drugs from the north (Colombia) or weapons from the south (Peru)."

The president also replaced the commander of the police, an entity widely seen as unwilling or unable to address the growing crime wave.

So far this year, the authorities have seized 37 tons of drugs. The number was 210 tons for the whole of 2021.

For Ponton, the escalating violence was "a kind of cumulative and growing time bomb," for Ecuador.

"The problem of Ecuador is that the state's response capacity is totally weakened in key areas: intelligence, criminal investigation, arms control," partly due to corruption.

According to a Transparency International report on corruption perception, Ecuador scored 36 in 2021 on a scale on which 100 represents clean government. This was lower than the average score of 43 for the Americas.

	"Organized crime cannot live without corruption," said Rivera.
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HEADLINE	03/02 SPD: 2 violent assaults International District
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-police-look-for-suspect-in-2-assaults-in-international-district
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Police are looking for a suspect in two violent assaults in the International District, only a short time apart.</p> <p>A 62-year-old woman told police she was walking up the stairs to leave the light rail station at Fifth and Jackson, when a man grabbed her and threw her back down the stairs. He came down after her and started kicking and punching her. She fought back, and the man went back up the stairs and left.</p> <p>The woman described her attacker as a Black man in his 30s, around 6'0" with a thin build, wearing a gray sweatshirt, gray sweatpants, dirty white tennis shoes and a dark puffy jacket. She also said he had a distinct cross tattoo on his left cheek.</p> <p>She was taken to Harborview Medical Center for treatment.</p> <p>Sound Transit security showed police footage of the attack, which showed the suspect take a bus up to 12th and Jackson.</p> <p>Shortly after, police say they received calls of a stabbing at that same bus stop. Witness accounts described the man as having a cross tattoo on his left cheek.</p> <p>The King County Sheriff's Office is investigating the stabbing.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/02 Mexico president asks cartel: change name
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/epxqjj/mexico-jalisco-cjng-cartel-name
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — Mexico's president has asked that the hyper-violent Jalisco New Generation Cartel do him a solid by changing its name.</p> <p>The proposed rebrand—removing the name of the western Mexican state of Jalisco—would be really appreciated, according to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, because it's affecting the image of the eponymous state where the gang is based.</p> <p>Jalisco is a popular tourism destination for both Mexicans and foreigners, and is famous for its mariachi music, regional cuisine and being the heartland of tequila.</p> <p>The bizarre request came during López Obrador's daily morning news conference on Tuesday after one of his top security officials detailed how an internal dispute between factions of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, or CJNG for its Spanish acronym, allegedly led to a viral video of the gangland executions over the weekend.</p> <p>López Obrador didn't provide alternate suggestions for the cartel's name, nor did he mention additional organized crime groups named after other Mexican states, most prominently the Sinaloa Cartel or the Michoacan Family. The CJNG has not appeared to comment on the request from the president, or suggested any new names of their own.</p> <p>The CJNG were founded by Nemesio Oseguera, aka El Mencho, around a dozen years ago as a faction of the now-defunct Milenio Cartel in the state of Jalisco. El Mencho himself was actually born and raised in neighboring Michoacán, where the CJNG is at war with other groups in the state for control of its lucrative criminal markets.</p>

The massacre on February 28 took place in San José de Gracia, a town in Michoacán that straddles the border of Jalisco. Video of the incident showed gunmen lining up at least a dozen people along a wall before appearing to mow them down with machine gun fire. The footage quickly spread throughout the country and shocked even the most grizzled drug war observers.

During the morning press conference on March 1, Mexico's Sub-secretary of Public Security Ricardo Mejía detailed [the government's version of what led to](#) the bloodbath.

He claimed that it was a dispute between two factions of the CJNG, one led by a man named Alejandro, alias El Pelón, and another by someone named Abel, aka El Toro.

El Pelón had allegedly worked as a local CJNG boss in the region, with El Toro as his subordinate. Both men hailed from San José de Gracia and had family in the town. When El Pelón was imprisoned for a time, El Toro took the reins as the local boss in the area.

It's unclear when El Pelón left prison, but in 2018, his brother disappeared. Mejía alleged that El Toro was behind the disappearance of El Pelón's brother.

By December 2021, El Pelón was free and reportedly running a different CJNG cell in a different region further away from San José de Gracia. That same month, Mejía alleged that El Pelón took revenge on El Toro by murdering his brother. El Toro then threatened El Pelón, telling a relative of his that if El Pelón ever set foot in San José de Gracia again, he would be killed.

When the mother of El Pelón died from an illness in February, he arrived in the town with 15 bodyguards to protect him while he attended the wake. But shortly after arriving, El Toro showed up in several trucks with a number of armed associates who were able to disarm El Pelón's men. They were then forced to stand outside, in front of a wall.

The shaky video that went viral on social media tells the rest of the story, which seemingly shows El Toro's men gunning down El Pelón and his associates. Mejía confirmed the death of El Pelón in the news conference.

The incident made international news after the gunmen reportedly were able to [spend several hours cleaning up the crime scene](#) and removing the bodies, without any interference from local police.

Michoacán state prosecutor Adrián López Solís said that three local police officers were on duty only blocks from the scene of the crime, but didn't intervene because "they didn't have sufficient force." By the time investigators arrived at the scene, only a bag full of brains and shell casings remained.

While fighting between CJNG factions is uncommon, the gang has been responsible for other massacres throughout the country with rival cartels. The group has gained a reputation as one of the most feared and violent criminal organizations in Mexico—not a good thing for a state looking to improve its reputation, according to the president.

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HEADLINE	03/03 Report: anti-Semitic propaganda jumps 27%
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/anti-semitic-propaganda-rose-in-u-s-last-year-report-finds-11646278985?mod=hp_lead_pos10
GIST	<p>The distribution of anti-Semitic pamphlets, banners and other propaganda jumped 27% in 2021 from the year before, even as overall distributions of hateful messaging fell slightly, according to a new report by the Anti-Defamation League.</p> <p>Hate groups typically leave pamphlets on home driveways, hang banners over highways or leave materials under windshield wipers on parked cars, said Carla Hill, associate director of the ADL's Center on Extremism.</p>

There were 352 incidents of anti-Semitic propaganda being distributed in 2021, up from 277 in 2020, the report released Thursday said. Overall white-supremacist propaganda distribution slipped 5% last year to 4,851 reported cases, the second largest amount since 2017, when the ADL started tracking incidents.

“One of the reasons it’s on the rise is one particular group, and that’s the Goyim Defense League,” Ms. Hill said. The ADL says the Goyim Defense League is a loose network of people with five or six primary organizers, dozens of supporters and thousands of online followers.

The network has recently increased the amount of anti-Semitic materials it distributes through monthly campaigns, Ms. Hill said. The ADL said the group was responsible for leaving [hateful messaging and materials in multiple cities across the U.S. last month](#), including in a Texas city where [a gunman held hostages in a synagogue](#) in January.

Extremist groups will often leave propaganda at places they know will get media attention, such as synagogues or Jewish museums, then try to use it to raise money or lure more members, Ms. Hill said.

Among incidents last year, according to the ADL, were “Hitler was right” fliers attached to a menorah in October at a synagogue in Carmichael, Calif., and stickers of swastikas left outside Anchorage’s Alaska Jewish Museum in May.

The ADL said it tracks white-supremacist propaganda distribution incidents using information from law-enforcement agencies, its regional offices and news reports.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Netflix heist drama film set burglarized
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/02/gang-steal-300000-of-equipment-from-lupin-set-in-paris
GIST	<p>A gang of masked thieves have stolen €300,000 (£250,000) worth of equipment from the set of the Netflix heist drama Lupin in France, according to reports.</p> <p>About 20 people broke on to the set after throwing mortar fireworks while the actor Omar Sy, who plays the protagonist, was performing in a scene, according to AFP.</p> <p>The robbery took place in a neighbourhood in Nanterre, on the outskirts of Paris, on 25 February. After a short hiatus, filming for part three of the drama resumed on Monday, Variety reported.</p> <p>Netflix told the website there had been “an incident” during filming of Lupin, adding: “Our cast and crew are safe and there were no injuries.” Authorities are investigating.</p> <p>Sy plays Assane Diop, a character inspired by the infamous gentleman thief and master of disguise Arsène Lupin. The show, produced by the French studio Gaumont, is Netflix’s second biggest international series after Squid Game.</p> <p>Only a few hours after the robbery, Sy was on stage at the César awards in Paris to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the comedy Intouchables, which in 2012 earned him a César prize for best actor.</p> <p>Last month £150,000 worth of props were stolen from the set of another Netflix series, The Crown.</p> <p>Three vehicles were broken into in a lorry park in Mexborough, South Yorkshire, while a unit was shooting nearby. Netflix said it did not affect the production.</p> <p>A spokesperson said after that incident: “We can confirm the antiques have been stolen and we hope that they are found and returned safely. Replacements will be sourced; there is no expectation that filming will be held up.”</p>

	<p>In October last year a thief mimicking the style of the protagonist in Lupin robbed the bar of a church oratory in northern Italy. The 21-year-old, who was not named, wore a leather jacket similar to the one worn by Diop.</p> <p>He told police he had closely studied the techniques of Diop in preparation for the heist. After entering the bar in Monza, the man stole about €21 from the till and a bottle of fizzy orange. However, he sustained injuries to his arm from smashing through the glass door, and after returning home he called for help.</p> <p>According to reports in the Italian press, the man initially concocted a story of having been attacked and robbed by three people. But he subsequently broke down in tears in front of the police, admitted his guilt and said he had been inspired by Lupin.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 ICC war crimes investigation Russia
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/icc-launches-war-crimes-investigation-russia-invasion-ukraine
GIST	<p>A war crimes investigation has been launched into Russia's invasion of Ukraine after an unprecedented number of countries backed the move and Boris Johnson called the military intervention "abhorrent".</p> <p>Karim Khan, the chief prosecutor for the international criminal court (ICC), said he would begin work "as rapidly as possible" to look for possible crimes against humanity or genocide committed in Ukraine.</p> <p>The referral for investigation by 39 countries – including the UK – will shave several months off the process because it allows Khan to by pass the need to seek the approval of the court in The Hague.</p> <p>It came as Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, braced for a siege and the Russian defence ministry claimed it was in "complete control" of Kherson, a southern port city near the Crimean peninsula.</p> <p>Khan said an "advanced team" of investigators was already travelling to Ukraine.</p> <p>The British lawyer told BBC Radio 4's Today programme the push for an inquiry by so many countries "allows us to jump-start investigations" and came on top of "evidence of international concern over events on the ground in Ukraine".</p> <p>"Individuals have rights to have their interests vindicated and for justice to prevail," Khan said.</p> <p>"That can only take place if evidence is independently and impartially collected and assessed and then in due course, decisions can be made regarding whether or not there's criminal responsibility, and then the judges ultimately will decide."</p> <p>Asked about reports Russia was using cluster bombs in civilian areas, Khan said "it is clear ... directing attacks against civilians and civilian objects amounts to a war crime".</p> <p>The ICC investigation will look back as far as 21 November 2013, when Ukraine's then president rejected closer integration with the EU, leading to huge protests that precipitated Russia's annexation of Crimea.</p> <p>Liz Truss, the UK foreign secretary, accused the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, of "targeting civilians indiscriminately" and directing troops to tear through towns across Ukraine. "The UK will work closely with allies to ensure justice is done," she said.</p> <p>The UK justice secretary, Dominic Raab, told the Daily Telegraph Britain could house Russian commanders suspected of war crimes in its prisons – and act as a safe haven for witnesses who testified against them. He said that "few countries around the world" had the UK's "lead information", which would likely prove "absolutely critical" to the ICC.</p>

As the Russian invasion entered its eighth day, the UN refugee agency estimated that 1 million people had now fled Ukraine, making it the swiftest exodus of refugees this century.

More than 2,000 civilians had died since the invasion began, Ukraine's state emergency service said.

Moscow's international isolation was further displayed when the UN general assembly voted overwhelmingly to demand Putin immediately withdraw Russian troops: 141 nations backed the motion and only five, including the alleged co-aggressor Belarus, opposed it.

The UK government has been criticised for the pace of sanctions being levelled on Russians close to Putin and their business interests. The Labour leader, Keir Starmer, questioned on Wednesday why it would take 18 months for a new register of property ownership to apply to existing owners.

Frans Timmermans, first vice-president of the European Commission, said he thought the UK was "following our lead".

After it was revealed the Conservatives had accepted an £80,000 donation from the former wife of one of Putin's ministers within the last six months, Timmermans added: "I think even parties who accepted funding from oligarchs should understand that they need to change course. Because, if I don't misunderstand the mood in the UK, that's what the British public want"

Damian Hinds, the UK security minister, told LBC radio: "I don't accept that my political party accepts money from illegitimate sources."

Hinds also welcomed the ICC investigation and said all indications suggested that Putin "is guilty" of war crimes.

UK officials have said more sanctions are coming, against oligarchs, Russian national security council members and banks, and that they believe the economic shock of the moves has been more significant than Putin was expecting

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HEADLINE	03/02 FBI arrests TikTok star identifying his shoes
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/2/chozen-terrell-hannah-tiktok-star-arrested-fbi-ide/
GIST	<p>The FBI arrested a social media influencer Wednesday after connecting him to several armed robberies in Michigan by identifying his shoes in TikTok videos.</p> <p>Chozen Terrell-Hannah, 22, was seen on TikTok dancing while wearing white and red Nike sneakers. Investigators say that they matched the shoes worn by Mr. Terrell-Hannah to four robberies between December and February, Detroit TV station WJBK, Fox-2, reported.</p> <p>An anonymous tipster directed police to Mr. Terrell-Hannah's 150,000-follower TikTok account, called ChozenWrld.</p> <p>Mr. Terrell-Hannah held up a 7-Eleven twice, a smoke shop and a gas station, according to federal authorities.</p> <p>The FBI said in the criminal complaint that Mr. Terrell-Hannah admitted to the crimes following his arrest, the Detroit News reported.</p> <p>He will have a federal court hearing in Detroit on charges of affecting interstate commerce and possessing a firearm during a violent crime.</p>
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HEADLINE	03/03 Secret global networks for child sex abuse
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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/03/world/asia/new-zealand-child-sexual-abuse.html
GIST	<p>A two-year investigation led by the authorities in New Zealand has resulted in the arrests of hundreds of people around the globe on charges of possessing and sharing child sexual abuse material, officials said on Wednesday. Dozens of children were moved out of harm's way as a result, the authorities said.</p> <p>The investigation, the largest of its kind led out of New Zealand, found a secret global networks that shared child sexual abuse images on a wide scale. In some cases, the pandemic provided cover for the illegal activity, as lockdowns kept children isolated at home and predators took to the web in search of victims, a British official said.</p> <p>The investigation, called Operation H, involved 12 countries and began in 2019, after an unnamed online service provider reported that its platform was being used to share horrific images of child sexual abuse. About 90,000 accounts were linked to the activity.</p> <p>That led to the discovery of 32 gigabytes of files, some of which included "sadistic acts of sexual abuse of infants and children," according to a statement from the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, known as Europol.</p> <p>Since then, at least 836 cases have been opened internationally, with more than 100 suspects identified across the European Union alone. Those arrested included 47 people in Canada, 43 in New Zealand and hundreds in Britain. In Australia, the police charged 121 men with 1,248 total offenses.</p> <p>"This operation will have an impact on the global networks that deal in the most horrific and damaging material, and we are extraordinarily proud of the effect it will have on children's lives around the world," said Tim Houston, who led the operation at the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand.</p> <p>The distribution of these images could create significant additional harm, Mr. Houston added. "Many people who view material of this kind will go on to physically offend against children," he said. "This is not a victimless crime; every time this material is viewed, that child is revictimized."</p> <p>Last year was the worst on record for the distribution of child sexual abuse images online, according to the Internet Watch Foundation, a charity based in England. In 2021, the foundation identified more than 250,000 instances of online images that featured children being sexually abused, an increase of almost 100,000, or nearly 70 percent, compared with images discovered in 2020.</p> <p>The investigation began in New Zealand, but it brought together security agencies in Australia, Austria, Britain, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia, Spain and the United States. Interpol also joined the case.</p> <p>The inquiry resulted in the rescue of 146 children around the world, including six in New Zealand and 79 in Britain. In Australia, 51 children across six states were moved to safety, including 23 in Queensland and 10 in South Australia.</p> <p>In one case each in Austria and Hungary, the suspects were accused of abusing their own children, who were 6 and 8 years old. And in Spain, a suspect both possessed and disseminated material about child sexual exploitation while making covert sexual images of adults without their consent, officials said.</p> <p>In some cases, those arrested on charges of possessing the material were later charged with more serious offenses. One unidentified offender in the South Island of New Zealand later admitted to "consuming child exploitation material for over 20 years as well as other forms of harmful material such as bestiality and torture bondage," according to the New Zealand authorities.</p> <p>The offender had traveled to Asia and paid families there to create images of their children being sexually abused for financial gain, the investigation found.</p>

“Although the offender denied engaging in sexual exploitation while abroad, it is likely from the information obtained that they were a sex tourist,” a spokesman at the Department of Internal Affairs in New Zealand said.

In Britain, officers from the National Crime Agency arrested 450 people on charges of using the platform, and those detentions often brought additional charges.

“Much of this activity took place during the Covid-19 lockdowns, when the majority of young people were at home and offenders had more time to spend online targeting their victims,” said Sarah Blight, a spokeswoman for the agency.

The agency found a pattern of offenders working in “positions of trust,” including at kindergartens and primary schools, in health care professions, as religious clergy or within law enforcement. One suspect, who worked as a night support worker in a children’s home, had hundreds of indecent images of children on his phone, officials said.

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HEADLINE	03/02 NYC arrest: attack spree on Asian women
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/nyregion/asian-women-attacked-nypd.html
GIST	<p>A 28-year-old Manhattan resident was arrested and charged with hate crimes Wednesday evening in connection with a two-hour spree of attacks on women of Asian descent in Manhattan over the weekend, another example of a grim wave of violence against Asian Americans.</p> <p>There was no indication that the assailant knew any of the seven victims, two of whom were treated at local hospitals. The police charged the Manhattan man, Steven Zajonc, with seven counts of assault and attempted assault classified as hate crimes and with seven counts of aggravated harassment and harassment that were not classified as hate crimes.</p> <p>Mr. Zajonc was taken into custody outside a public library in Midtown on Wednesday afternoon, a police spokesman said. The police said the man, originally from Florida, had declined to make a statement after his arrest Wednesday night.</p> <p>The first attack took place at about 6:30 p.m. on Sunday around 30th Street and Madison Avenue, when the man approached a 57-year-old woman and, without uttering a word, punched her in the face, the police said. Ten minutes later and a block west, the nightmare repeated itself. The second victim was 25.</p> <p>The attacks all followed the same template as the assailant made his way south. The next two victims, punched in the face just minutes apart, were also in their early 20s. At 7:05 p.m., a 19-year-old was elbowed in the face at Union Square. Twenty minutes later, the man was on East Houston Street near Mott Street, where he elbowed another woman in the mouth.</p> <p>The man then headed north to Greenwich Village. The last attack occurred near Eighth Street and Broadway, close to New York University, at about 8:40 p.m. The victim, 20, was shoved to the ground before the man fled west.</p> <p>“There was no prior interaction, and no statements were made” in any of the incidents, the police said.</p> <p>The man’s image was captured by surveillance cameras in several locations, and the attacks were being investigated by the department’s Hate Crime Task Force.</p> <p>Anti-Asian violence in the city has soared during the pandemic; the police recorded 131 bias incidents against Asians in 2021, up from 28 in 2020 and just three in 2019. Activists caution that incidents are not always reported to the police or classified as hate crimes, making it difficult to capture the true extent to which Asians are being targeted.</p>

Attacks against Asian New Yorkers have recently led to four deaths. [Yao Pan Ma](#), a Chinese immigrant, was beaten as he collected cans in East Harlem in April and died from his injuries on New Year's Eve. [Michelle Alyssa Go](#) was pushed to her death at the Times Square subway station in January. Last month, [Christina Yuna Lee](#) was fatally stabbed by a man who followed her into her Chinatown apartment. And [GuiYing Ma](#), who was attacked as she swept a sidewalk in the Corona neighborhood of Queens in November, died of her injuries last week.

Other recent examples of assaults abound, including one that targeted [a Korean diplomat](#) and another involving an Asian American performer who was on his way to a preview performance of "The Chinese Lady" by the Ma-Yi Theater Company and the Public Theater.

In a [statement](#) last week, the artistic directors of the two companies, Ralph B. Peña and Oskar Eustis, wrote that the performer's glasses had been broken, his eye had been bruised and he had been kicked several times.

"We are sharing this because the attack on this Asian American artist, which happened near Seward Park not far from where Christina Yuna Lee was tragically murdered, is another incident in a long history of violence against Asian Americans," they said. "The violence and the hatred that fuels it remain disgusting and heartbreaking and have created an environment full of fear where safety seems scarce for our Asian American neighbors."

A police spokesman said on Wednesday that the attack on the diplomat was being investigated as a hate crime and that the attack on the performer, who is 16, had been classified as a harassment complaint.

Nationwide, [Stop AAPI Hate](#), a coalition of community and academic organizations, tracked more than 10,300 attacks and other incidents targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders from March 2020 to September 2021. Surveys have also shown that large numbers of Asian Americans are fearful of attacks and harassment, impeding the slow return to normalcy as the pandemic ebbs.

City Councilwoman Carlina Rivera, who represents the district where nearly all of the attacks on Sunday took place, [said in a statement](#) that she was "equal parts devastated and enraged" about the events.

"Condemnation is not enough," she said.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Rising violence, disorder on Rikers Island
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/02/nyregion/nyc-jail-beating-rikers.html
GIST	<p>When a man was beaten on Rikers Island in December, guards at the New York City jail complex downplayed his injuries, delaying filing a report and then including only minimal information: Fractured eye socket. Swelling of the head. No hospitalization required.</p> <p>The reality looked much different. Hours after another detainee slammed the man, Jose Matias, 25, to the floor and kicked him in the head, Mr. Matias began having seizures. He was taken to a hospital, where doctors removed a chunk of his skull to ease swelling in his brain. He spent six weeks in a coma and, when he emerged, had to relearn how to walk and talk.</p> <p>It was at least the second time in four months that the Department of Correction had failed to document a serious injury to a person in custody, records and interviews show. In the other case, in August, a man being held in an intake cell was beaten so badly by another detainee that he was paralyzed from the neck down. No reports were ever filed, and, as far as the jail system's records were concerned, the assault never happened.</p> <p>For all of the alarms that have been sounded over rising violence and disorder on Rikers Island, the two cases raise an astonishing prospect: that the levels of brutality experienced by detainees over the past year might have been even worse than was previously known.</p>

The episodes also raise questions about the thoroughness of an incident-reporting process that is supposed to give the public an accurate picture of violence inside the jails and equip policymakers with data on which to base decisions.

It is a system that has broken down in the past. Investigators with the Department of Correction found in 2012 that a warden and his deputy [had omitted hundreds of detainee fights](#) from departmental statistics to make their jail seem safer than it was. A review by the Board of Correction, an oversight panel, in 2019 found that the department was frequently underreporting serious injuries sustained by people in custody, and when reports were filed important information was often missing.

And The New York Times [reported in January](#) that jailers had failed to document the harm that befell detainees who were forced by a gang leader to participate in a “fight night” while other incarcerated people cheered them on.

But the injuries suffered by the two detainees in August and December — which have not been previously reported — occurred at a time when Rikers Island was already under intense scrutiny for its high rates of violence, and as members of Congress were calling for the Biden administration to step in.

This article is based on interviews with 11 people, including current and former jail workers and other criminal justice officials and members of the detainees’ families, as well as a review of jail injury reports and court records.

A Department of Correction spokeswoman said both incidents were under investigation. Louis Molina, the jails commissioner, declined to be interviewed. He said in a statement that he had identified deficiencies within the department and intended to “correct the dysfunction” that he inherited from the previous administration, but he did not elaborate.

Appointed in January by Mayor Eric Adams, Mr. Molina is facing the worst crisis to befall the city jail system since the crack epidemic crested in the early 1990s. After the coronavirus pandemic first swept through, thousands of correction officers stopped going to work. Gang members gained control over some housing areas, and other detainees were left to fend for themselves, often going without food or basic health care. Rates of violence rose sharply.

[At least 16 people died after being held in the jail system](#) last year — many in preventable ways — and on Sunday Rikers Island recorded its first death in 2022, officials said, after a 38-year-old man, Tarz Youngblood, was found “unresponsive” inside the George R. Verno Center and doctors were unable to revive him.

“One of my main priorities is to streamline our data analysis and reporting structures, which will allow us to provide accurate and timely information to our stakeholders,” Mr. Molina said in the statement.

Tens of thousands of detainees were hurt last year in the jail system, city records show. More than 1,900 suffered lacerations, concussions or broken bones. Of those, at least 450 were injured so severely that they had to be hospitalized — nearly triple the number in 2020.

No city official can address the problems on Rikers Island without an accurate incident-reporting system, said Bryanne Hamill, a former member of the Board of Correction.

“It paints a very different picture,” Ms. Hamill said, “if the mayor and his staff are not given the proper information to understand the seriousness of what is occurring on Rikers.”

‘His whole life is over’

Khaled Eltahan spent years working blue-collar jobs before drug addiction knocked his life off course, his sister, Fatima Power, said in an interview.

Hooked first on prescription painkillers and then on heroin, he stole batteries, razors, power tools and other items from pharmacies and hardware stores to support his habit, amassing a lengthy arrest record. Records show he pleaded guilty to a number of charges related to thefts in Queens last summer and was sent to Rikers Island to serve out a 60-day sentence.

When Mr. Eltahan arrived on Aug. 18, the jail complex was in free fall. Staffing problems were causing delays in processing new detainees, leading some men to spend days or weeks packed into intake pens designed to hold people for only 24 hours at a time.

Guards led him into a cell about noon, according to a person with knowledge of his case, who, like others interviewed about Mr. Eltahan and Mr. Matias, spoke on condition of anonymity to describe matters that are actively being investigated.

Mr. Eltahan retreated to a space on the floor, said Anthony Lopez, who was being held in the same cell on a parole violation charge and who, after examining a photo of Mr. Eltahan, said that he was certain he witnessed what happened to him that day. His account was corroborated in large part by details Mr. Eltahan's sister said he shared with her soon after his release.

Mr. Lopez said Mr. Eltahan lay down, and his pants sagged low enough to partially expose his buttocks. The sight angered a gang member, who ordered him to adjust his clothing and then began kicking him furiously in the stomach, back and head, Mr. Lopez and Ms. Power said.

Soon after, it was clear that something was wrong with Mr. Eltahan. He did not move from a fetal position, Mr. Lopez said, and he spent what seemed like hours begging officers for help. "He said, 'I can't feel,'" Mr. Lopez said. "Nobody came to get him."

About five hours after Mr. Eltahan entered the cell, officers with helmets and batons filed in, according to the person with knowledge of the case. Then medical staff arrived, loaded Mr. Eltahan onto a gurney and took him to the clinic.

At one point, an orderly accused him of faking paralysis and pushed him off the cart, Ms. Power said her brother told her. Mr. Eltahan landed on the floor and struck his head again.

It was not until after midnight that he was taken to a hospital by ambulance, according to the person with knowledge of his case.

At Elmhurst Hospital, doctors discovered that Mr. Eltahan had been paralyzed from the neck down and suffered broken ribs and collapsed lungs, Ms. Power said. He spent three weeks in a coma — during which a state judge granted him time served in a bedside proceeding. A ventilator whirled in the background.

In December, Mr. Eltahan, 41, was transferred to a nursing home in Far Rockaway. He developed sores on his body from being unable to move his limbs. Recently, he caught pneumonia and was hospitalized and placed on a ventilator again, his sister said.

"His whole life is over," Ms. Power said. "I wouldn't wish this upon anybody."

Reporting failures

About three weeks later, a monitor who was appointed by a federal judge to oversee reforms on Rikers Island learned about the beating of Mr. Eltahan — it was not clear how — and asked jail officials for more information, according to the person with knowledge of the case.

Top jail investigators checked the agency's records but could find no trace of the beating, the person said. The city's Department of Investigation opened a criminal investigation into the jail system's handling of the case. Ms. Power said investigators interviewed her brother in September.

The apparent reporting failure occurred despite pledges by Department of Correction officials to do a better job of accounting for serious injuries. After the Board of Correction [found major gaps](#) in incident reporting in 2018, the city created a computerized tracking system and provided training for jail workers on how to complete injury reports.

The board review also found that seriously injured detainees had to wait, on average, about two hours before receiving medical care and that many incident reports lacked basic information, such as the times the injuries occurred and the names of people who witnessed them.

Mr. Eltahan's case was still under investigation when Jose Matias was beaten on Dec. 13. The incident began when Mr. Matias, who had been on Rikers Island about a month, awaiting trial for an alleged shooting in 2019, punched another detainee he was feuding with in his housing unit, according to a person familiar with Mr. Matias's case.

No jailers were guarding the dormitory floor, and an officer had to exit an enclosed observation station to intervene. When the officer left, the other detainee threw Mr. Matias to the floor and kicked him, the person said. Other detainees broke up the fight.

It was not immediately clear to the officers on duty that Mr. Matias had been seriously injured, and he was taken to and from the infirmary at least twice before a jailer noticed a visible pulsing on his head, said Joseph Russo, the leader of the union that represents assistant deputy wardens and deputy wardens. Only after Mr. Matias began having seizures was he taken to a hospital for emergency skull surgery, said his mother, Najaris Remigio.

He remained in a coma and on life support until early February, said Ms. Remigio, who added that the incident had altered his life. "I don't know what to say," she said of her son's treatment by the jail system. "It's like they're not human beings."

Department investigators received no reports about the beating and learned about it a day later, through word-of-mouth, the person familiar with the case said. The investigators approached the guards on the housing unit and instructed them to file the required paperwork. The report they submitted incorrectly stated that Mr. Matias had not been hospitalized.

The incident remains under review by the Correction Department, and the Bronx district attorney's office is examining the actions of the other detainee involved. A civil attorney for Mr. Matias has filed a notice of intent to sue the city.

A failure to properly report beatings is not simply a paperwork error, said Sarena Townsend, the jails' former chief investigator.

It can compromise criminal and administrative investigations, lead to evidence being tainted or lost and make prosecuting cases more challenging. It can also create a false impression of what conditions are like on Rikers Island.

"When individuals are not held accountable, they act with impunity, and that goes for staff and incarcerated people," Ms. Townsend said. "Violence is going to increase, and it's just going to continue this cycle of unsafe conditions."

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HEADLINE	03/02 Guilty plea 'seditious conspiracy' Jan 6 riot
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/alabama-man-pleads-guilty-to-seditious-conspiracy-related-to-jan-6-riot
GIST	An Alabama man affiliated with the far-right Oath Keepers militia group pleaded guilty Wednesday to seditious conspiracy for his actions leading up and through the Jan. 6 riot , marking the first person involved in the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol to be convicted of the rarely used charge.

The sentencing guideline range for Joshua A. James, who also pleaded guilty to a charge of obstruction of an official proceeding, was estimated to be 7¼ to nine years in prison.

The 34-year-old from Arab, Alabama, acknowledged getting into a physical altercation with a police officer while inside the Capitol and participating in a plan to use force to hinder or delay the transfer of presidential power. James also agreed to cooperate with authorities investigating the riot, including testifying before a grand jury.

Authorities say James and others affiliated with the group rode golf carts to the Capitol, moved through the crowd in a military-style "stack" formation and went into the building.

James was accused of pushing past officers who tried to stop rioters from moving toward the Rotunda, joining others who confronted officers and profanely proclaiming the building was his. A week before the riot, James said in an encrypted chat that he believed teams within the militia group were adequately armed, prosecutors said in court records.

While four other people connected with the Oath Keepers have pleaded guilty to obstruction of Congress and a lesser conspiracy charge, James is the first among the 11 people associated with the group to plead guilty to a seditious conspiracy charge.

The seditious conspiracy prosecution is the boldest publicly known attempt so far by the government to prosecute those who attacked the U.S. Capitol. The group's founder, Stewart Rhodes, and others have pleaded not guilty to seditious conspiracy and other charges. A seditious conspiracy conviction carries a maximum penalty of 20 years, compared with five years on the lesser conspiracy charge facing other group members.

Those charged with seditious conspiracy are accused of working together to use force to stop the peaceful transfer of presidential power. Authorities say participants discussed their plans in encrypted chats, traveled to the nation's capital from across the country, organized into teams, used military tactics, stashed weapons in case they felt they were needed and communicated with each other during the riot on Jan. 6, 2021.

Prosecutors say the group set up a "quick reaction force," or QRF, that kept guns at a hotel in nearby Arlington, Virginia, and were prepared to bring the weapons into Washington if Rhodes or associates believed the need arose. Days before the attack, one defendant suggested getting a boat to ferry weapons across the Potomac River. In the end, the QRF teams didn't bring guns into Washington.

At the Capitol, Oath Keepers marched in two teams in stack formation, with team members advancing forward with one hand on the shoulder of the person in front of them.

More than 750 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the riot. Over 220 riot defendants have pleaded guilty, more than 100 have been sentenced and at least 90 others have trial dates.

The attack resulted in the deaths of five people, including a police officer. More than 100 officers were injured. Rioters caused over \$1 million in damage.

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HEADLINE	03/02 Seattle police: deadly shooting 3 rd Avenue
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/person-wounded-in-shooting-on-third-avenue-in-downtown-seattle/
GIST	Police are investigating a shooting that left a young man dead Wednesday evening in the 1500 block of Third Avenue in downtown Seattle, according to Seattle police.

The shooting victim, who appears to be in his late teens or early 20s, suffered a wound to the abdomen, Detective Valerie Carson said. The victim was taken to Harborview Medical Center in critical condition, but he later died, she said.

Transit service was rerouted off Third Avenue between Stewart and University streets, according to King County Metro.

Police received reports of the shooting around 7:15 p.m., and arriving officers gave the young man aid before Seattle Fire Department medics arrived, Carson said.

Police are reviewing surveillance video from the area to see whether it may have captured the shooting as they search for a suspect, Carson said.

The shooting happened four blocks from another [shooting Sunday near Third and Pine Street](#) that left one man dead. The shooting and other incidents of violence prompted city officials to say they plan to increase the presence of law enforcement in the area.

City officials said their strategy to address the longtime issues with violence will include a [consistent law-enforcement presence](#) along with an emphasis on making felony arrests. Other efforts include plans to renew business presence and foot traffic.

But many business owners have said it's difficult to get foot traffic in an area that does not feel safe for customers or employees.

After Sunday's deadly shooting, the owner of Piroshky Piroshky bakery said she planned to close out of concern for her employees and customers.

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HEADLINE	03/01 Judge: no entrapment Whitmer kidnap case
SOURCE	https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2022/03/01/governor-gretchen-whitmer-kidnap-plot-fbi-entrapment-militia-wolverine-watchmen/6979795001/
GIST	<p>A Jackson County judge Tuesday denied a motion to dismiss the criminal cases against three men accused in a plot to kidnap Gretchen Whitmer because their lawyers had argued the FBI entrapped their clients.</p> <p>Jackson County Circuit Court Judge Thomas Wilson said an FBI investigation, which involved the use of an informant identified in court only as Dan, did not "escalate" the alleged plot by the Michigan-based militia Wolverine Watchmen to kidnap Whitmer.</p> <p>The alleged plot, which prosecutors have said was spawned over anger over Whitmer's COVID-19 policies and mandates at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, was foiled in October of 2020.</p> <p>Three men, Paul Bellar, 23, of Milford, Joseph Morrison, 27, and his father-in-law Pete Musico, 44, both from Munith, are expected to face trial in September.</p> <p>"I just cannot, in reviewing this matter, (see) that the government ... somehow pressured any one of these individuals to participate in anything, or to get in line with this way of thinking," Wilson said, referring to ideology espoused by the Wolverine Watchmen. "That was the very reason that we got the confidential informant in the very beginning was as soon as he had joined the group and learned that they were talking about harming police officers and potentially politicians that he contacted the FBI because of his concern out of what potentially could happen."</p> <p>"Dan" initially turned down the FBI's request to help, Wilson said.</p> <p>"They asked him if he would reconsider," Wilson said. "He did."</p>

Wilson set a trial date for Sept. 12. A pre-trial hearing is scheduled for 9 a.m. on Aug. 8.

Bellar, Morrison and Musico are facing trial on charges of gang membership and providing material support for terrorism, both punishable by up to 20 years in prison, as well as felony firearm, punishable by up to two years in prison.

They are accused of aiding six others who are charged in federal court with conspiring to kidnap Whitmer, including two men who pleaded guilty and four who are scheduled to stand trial on March 8 in Grand Rapids. Five more are also charged in state courts.

Kareem Johnson, Musico's attorney, said Tuesday he was disappointed with the ruling but that "fortunately a jury will have the final say so."

Johnson said he and his client "already acknowledged during testimony" that Musico did have an interest in meeting Adam Fox, one of the so-called leaders of the alleged plot but changed his mind before the FBI informant "vouched" for Fox.

Morrison's attorney Nicholas Somberg said the judge's ruling Tuesday "was not unexpected" adding that his client also was not surprised by it.

"You gotta be pretty courageous to dismiss that type of case," said Somberg Tuesday. "Obviously there's a huge investigation. It's national news. By dismissing based on entrapment you're basically going against the governor herself, the attorney general and the FBI. "

"I'm still very confident in (the) trial. They're not charged with plotting. They're charged with providing material support to a plot. The evidence shows that there's no material support. "

Bellar's lawyer, Andrew Kirkpatrick, also expressed disappointment in Tuesday's ruling but is confident in the judge's handling of the case.

Kirkpatrick said while an entrapment defense is "difficult to prove" his client did not participate in any plans to support a plot to kidnap Whitmer.

"I don't see a Jackson County jury convicting my client of materially supporting a terrorist act," said Kirkpatrick. "He wasn't involved in any of it. He was in the state of South Carolina at the time."

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